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THE
SAILOR
HERO

BY CAPTAIN ARMSTRONG

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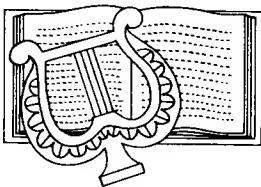
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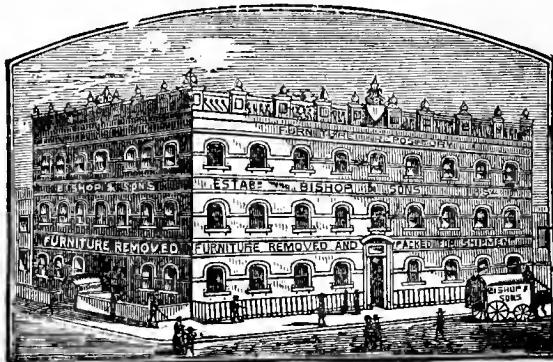
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THE
SUNNY SOUTH.

BY
CAPTAIN F. C. ARMSTRONG,

AUTHOR OF "THE CRUISE OF THE DARING," "THE SAILOR HERO,"
"THE TWO MIDSHIPMEN," ETC.



LEVER BROTHERS, LTD.,
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THE
SUNNY SOUTH.

CHAPTER I.

THE ENCAMPMENT.

ABOUT five leagues from the once important and flourishing city of Pisa, lies a valley of great beauty and fertility, though of circumscribed extent. The surrounding hills, of moderate height, are rich to their very summits in vegetation.

Winding through this valley ran a clear and placid stream, which shortly after became lost in the wider and more classic waters of the Arno. On each side of this stream the pasturage was rich ; and, at the period of our tale, about the middle of the fourteenth century, its whole extent was dotted with the white tents of a very large body of Condottieri.

These tents, however, were not scattered over the valley in picturesque confusion, as might be supposed from the nature and inclination of the reckless bands of mercenaries then spread over the lands of the South ; but, on the contrary, were ranged in perfect order and regularity, round a very large octagon pavilion, over the summit of which waved the broad banner of St. George of England.

Though after this chapter we have nothing farther to do with the doughty Sir John Hawkwood—whose name was celebrated throughout Italy—we must introduce him here. Within the centre pavilion, which was handsomely lined with crimson cloth, its pillars supporting arms and armour, were spread on a table several large, roughly-sketched charts ; and looking over these sat the English knight and a young man about twenty-five years of age.

This latter cavalier had already given celebrity to the name of Paoli, having achieved extraordinary fame in his heroic defence of his country, Corsica ; and also, during a period of two

years, passed in fighting under the Pisan banner, when he received the honour of being created a Knight of St. Stephen—a military order then existing, and admitting only personages of high station and renown into their community.

Giacinto Paoli was remarkable for his height, immense strength, and extraordinary skill in the use of all warlike weapons. Singularly graceful in person, and eminently handsome, he won not only admiration by his personal appearance, but by the generosity and nobleness of his disposition.

"Now, Giacinto," said Sir John Hawkwood, laying down his dagger, with which he was tracing a road across a most intricate looking country, roughly sketched on one of the charts, "let me hear your adventures since we parted. I need not say how grieved I was on learning your noble father's fate, and the conquest of your native land by those crafty Genoese—a conquest they would never have achieved without the aid of France."

"In truth, Sir John," replied the young knight, "my adventures have little of interest. But as the recital will explain to you my reason for seeking service in the Venetian republic, I will briefly relate them.

"My father, you are aware, was betrayed into the hands of the Genoese general, Mastino Campaldino, one of the most cruel, ferocious, and crafty commanders ever sent by Genoa into Corsica.

"I was retreating with my cousin, Otho Sampiero, who, you may remember, visited me for a short period at Pisa."

"A noble and high-spirited youth, indeed," interposed Sir John.

"We were retreating before an overwhelming force of Genoese and French," pursued Giacinto, "when news reached us that the strong fortress of Corte had fallen into the hands of the Genoese through treachery; and that my father, General Paoli, and Cicaldi, and several other brave chiefs had been taken prisoners, and barbarously executed on the walls of the citadel, as traitors and rebels, by order of Mastino Campaldino. I at once vowed never to sheath my sword, or quit the island, till I accomplished the death of the Genoese general, who had so cruelly put my father to death.

"I will not weary you with minute details. The overpowering force of Genoese and French, aided by swarms of vile adventurers, drove us to the mountains for safety. The whole island submitted, after many towns, villages, and castles had been burnt and destroyed, and the inhabitants massacred.

"My cousin Otho and myself, with five hundred men, defied, for many months, all the efforts of the Genoese commander to

draw us out of our retreat. I was ardently waiting for an opportunity to avenge my father's death, and then fly my unhappy country, which I could no longer defend.

"At length my scouts brought me word that Campaldino had left Corte, at the head of more than eight hundred Genoese and French. He was to be joined by a body of two thousand adventurers, outlaws, and assassins, shipped from the prisons of Genoa, and pardoned on condition of fighting against the Corsicans ; Campaldino having sworn to drive us from our fastnesses, and massacre every man with arms in his hands.

"I now resolved to attack the Genoese general as he and his force passed through the celebrated gorge of Gravellino—one of the most remarkable defiles in the island. This singular gorge resembles a deep cut made by art through a mountain of rock, the sides being perpendicular. The pass is nearly a mile in length—the summits of the two sides being covered by gigantic pines.

"We reached this pass two days before Mastino. Cutting the immense pines nearly through, we supported them by ropes. Enormous rocks were loosened by the brave peasantry, who worked day and night. In fact, a fearful avalanche was prepared to overwhelm the Genoese force as it defiled through the gorge.

"The day on which I expected to destroy this cruel enemy to Corsica broke clear and bright. Not a breath of wind stirred the leaves of the low shrubs behind which I had posted my men ; while two hundred peasants stood ready with their axes to cut away the ropes that held the mass above. From where my cousin and myself were posted, we could see the entrance of the gorge. A note from my bugle was to be the signal to those above.

"As I anxiously fixed my eyes in the direction I expected to see the enemy advance, I heard the clear notes of the French horn break the perfect stillness that reigned around ; and a very few minutes after, we beheld the glitter of arms. Singular enough for a soldier of Campaldino's experience, he led his forces into the gorge of Gravellino without any precaution. The band in advance was composed of adventurers, who marched without order or banner. After them came the Genoese general, at the head of his well-armed and disciplined soldiers. My squire, Pulini, who knew Campaldino, pointed him out to me amidst the group of officers ; for, as yet, I had never encountered him. He was in complete mail, and rode one of the small Corsican horses.

"I allowed the Genoese force to enter the pass about half way before I gave the signal from my bugle. The instant the

first note reached the ear of Campaldino, he ordered a halt; the next instant, the fearful avalanche of timber and rock came thundering down the mountain, uprooting vast masses of rock. It appeared as if the sides of the gorge had collapsed, so terrible was the scene. Hundreds were entombed beneath this awful mass of materials. In the midst of the horror excited by this unexpected event, we sallied out from our secure retreats on both sides, and fell upon the remnants of Campaldino's force. The Genoese general was himself unhurt, as I purposely allowed him and about three hundred of his men to advance beyond the critical spot. Recovering from his surprise, he offered a bold front, while those left alive of the adventurers fled wildly through the pass. I soon reached the side of Mastino, shouting my name, and my father's wrongs, in his ear. Campaldino seemed paralyzed. Still he strove to defend himself, uttering some words which, in the excitement of the moment, I did not hear; and in less than five minutes he lay slain at my feet. Mastino's son and about two hundred of his followers contrived to escape; but the adventurers lost nearly half their number.

"After this my force dispersed; for, having consulted Gaffieri and other chiefs, we all agreed that at that time to prolong the contest would only bring greater misery upon Corsica. We therefore agreed to separate and get, as best we could, to the Continent. I then made the best of my way with only twenty men; and was guided by my attached follower Pulini into the pieve of Orto, my father's property. The mansion was in ruins, the land laid waste, and the town and villages burnt some time back by order of Campaldino. Here, in a secret place, my father had buried the family plate and jewels. Pulini, who is my father's foster-brother, knew the spot. This practice of burying the family property is always resorted to by Corsican lords, in the event of an invasion. Here I separated from my cousin Sampiero, who set out for his own domain, intending to make his way with Gaffieri across to Sardinia, and agreeing, if we were so fortunate as to escape, to meet in Rome.

"A short time after our separation, with six followers only, I contrived, during a dark and stormy night, to cut away a Tartana from the harbour of Mariana; and the gale blowing from the coast of Corsica, we steered for the Italian shore. Accustomed, from my earliest years, to the sea, and passionately fond of the element, I found no difficulty in conducting my bark to Piombino. There I landed with Pulini, and whatever valuables I had dug up from our buried property. My countrymen then sailed for Sardinia, intending, after a time, to get back to their wives and families.

“ At this period I was only two-and-twenty years of age. When I left the city of Pisa six years previously, you were fighting under her banner ; and though then only sixteen, I obtained leave from my father, who was greatly attached to you, to practise arms under your eye ; and to your watchful care and kindness I owe my skill in them. I heard, on my arrival, that you were in the Milanese—Pisa was then at war with Florence. During two years that the war lasted, I fought for her, gained some renown, and became a Knight of St. Stephen’s. I then proceeded to Rome ; and, to my infinite joy, heard from his kinsman, the Colonna, that my cousin Otho had reached Rome in safety. But he was absent, not liking an idle life, and I resolved to follow up a project which my lamented father desired I should undertake, should he fall in the contest with Genoa, and be forced to fly from the island.

“ A short time previous to his setting out for the citadel of Corte, my father said to me, ‘ Should it please Providence, my beloved son, that I fall, and you are forced to fly your country, I know no better banner under which you can serve than the Lion of St. Mark. In my youth I chanced to save, in Florence, the life of a Venetian merchant of great wealth, by name Tiepolo. We were nearly the same age ; a friendship ensued ; and for several months we traversed many parts of Italy together, till he recovered from his wound. We then parted—he to return to Venice, and I to Corsica. He pressed on my finger at parting,’ continued my father, ‘ this valuable and splendid ring, which I now give you, saying at the time,—*The possessor of this ring may command the fortunes of Tiepolo.*’

“ Hearing in Rome that Venice was engaged in a fierce war with Genoa, I determined to set out at once for that far-famed city of the waves ; but, having left my horses and arms at Pisa, I returned here, and was delighted and surprised to learn you had encamped in this valley. I therefore at once resolved to pay you this visit on my way.

“ So now, dear Sir John, you know my reason for wishing to serve under the banner of the Venetian republic—the war is against our old and bitter enemies ; and the more they are crippled the better for Corsica, who may yet make a struggle for her liberty.”

“ Well, I trust in God she may !” said Sir John heartily ; “ for I love freedom, and I detest those crafty Genoese. But, at all events, I have my doubts about their rivals, the Venetians. It is a government I do not admire. I hate mystery. However, since your noble father wished you to take service under the ‘ Winged Lion,’ I will not farther press my offer of five

hundred free lances. Still, remember that should you get disgusted with the worthy ten Councillors of St. Mark, and I remain in the land of the living, they are still at your service."

Giacinto Paoli pressed the hand of the worthy English knight, and expressed his thanks warmly.

"But now, my dear boy," resumed Sir John, "let me give you a brief outline of the state of this fair land wherein you are about to try your fortunes. No man can have greater experience of the Italian character, their customs and political opinions and factions, than myself. Sunk in sloth and luxury, the native princes and rulers have left their possessions at the mercy of numerous predatory bands, under various denominations. There are Black Bands and White Bands, Condottieri, Companies of Adventurers, Free Lances, and German Barbuti. No matter what may be their names, their objects are the same. We are old rivals ; only, thank God, my brave fellows are widely different from the others, who, when not engaged in war, are nothing better than robbers ; fighting one day for a certain ruler, and the next day quite willing to cut his throat, provided they get well paid for it. So distracted, indeed, is this most unhappy land by dissensions amongst themselves, and devastations committed by foreign adventurers, that the terrified cultivators of the soil are compelled to live within walled towns. There is not a city in Italy that is not distracted by faction. Not even the great pestilence that swept over the whole face of Europe, cutting off from the earth a third of its population, was able to check this terrible disunion amongst the princes of Italy. This very disunion, jealousy, and hatred of one another, is the cause of the formidable bands you will find dispersed over the whole of Italy, from north to south. Now, Genoa and Venice, amid this turmoil of party and faction, have risen to eminence, and their nobles and merchants, through commerce, are the wealthiest in the world. Not that these cities are free from faction, as you know yourself. Genoa is at times convulsed to its centre. Such is the field, my dear boy, in which you have to try your fortunes. You are first going to Florence, and I think it most likely that I shall accept the offer made by that republic. If not, I shall close with the Marquis of Montferrat's proposals. You see that range of hills marked on this chart," continued he, taking up one of the maps and pointing out with his dagger a very dubious line of road across a most mountainous country, "you must avoid crossing those hills," added Sir John. "You see, by following the borders of this river," sticking, as he spoke, his dagger's point into a long black serpentine mark—"you skirt the foot of the hills ; and,

crossing that ferry—which, by-the-bye, I would for more than one reason advise you to do—you will pass more than a league from the camp of a notorious freebooter and his German Barbuti."

"You mean, I suppose," interrupted Paoli, "the German condottieri leader, Guarnieri?"

"The same," returned the English knight—"Duke Guarnieri, as the Italians style him. You have heard, then, something of this scourge of the human race? for, in truth, such he is."

"Not much," replied Paoli; "merely some vague rumours while passing through Sienna. I heard it said that he and his troops were urging the Florentine Signori into a breach of the truce between their republic and the Marquis of Montferrat."

"No, no, you are out there," said Sir John. "But I will give you a very brief outline of this remarkable but most detestable chief's career. We have met once on opposite sides, and it looks like as if we shall do so again. Duke Guarnieri is a German by birth. His real name is Werner, and he comes of a good but impoverished family. In person he is gigantic. In his youth he is said to have been remarkably handsome. In early life his character was noted for reckless bravery, and an extraordinary skill in the use of almost every weapon. It seems he won the love of a very beautiful maiden, the daughter of a German baron of high descent, and carried her off. Such was the rage and vengeance of her powerful family that the lovers fled their country. Of his varied fortune for a long time little is known. Some years ago he made his appearance in Lombardi under the name of Guarnieri, and at the head of a most lawless band. Increasing by degrees his forces, he entered the service of the Lord of Padua. Some splendid actions, but blasted by the most atrocious cruelties, soon rendered his name notorious. His vices and detestable cruelties increased; his deeds and actions, allowing for exaggeration, are more the actions of a fiend than a human being. His wife, Hermangarde, accompanies him everywhere; and, I have heard, has saved many a victim from his lawless passions. He has one son—a greater *diabolus, par excellence*, than his sire. Duke Guarnieri wears a cuirass, on which is engraved in gold the impious and horrid sentence 'Enemy of God, of Man, and of Pity.' **

"Is this possible?" exclaimed the Corsican, much astonished.

"Fact, my young friend," returned Sir John; "proud of his immense strength and stature, confident of the devotion of the five thousand well-disciplined men he leads, he thinks nothing of forcing well-fortified cities to pay him ransom. His boast

* See Percival's History of Italy.

is that no man ever yet withstood him in single combat. Such is Duke Guarnieri. Now if he with his band intend—which the Florentines are apprehensive he does—to traverse their territories, plundering and devastating, and extorting ransom from the various towns—we shall take the field in the pay of Florence. If not, and if he shapes his course towards the Paduan states, I shall take the offer of the Marquis of Montferrat. Therefore, as I was pointing out to you the road, I think you may as well avoid altogether the encampment of this Duke Guarnieri. Neither he nor his troop are over-scrupulous in levying contributions, whether from travellers or cities, or strong bodies of armed pilgrims."

"Well, as there is neither honour nor glory to be obtained," replied Paoli, "in an encounter with this German freehooter, I will follow your advice, Sir John. After a few days' stay in Florence I will proceed to Ravenna, and embark there for Venice."

"By St. George, Giacinto!" said the English knight, laughing, "if you serve long with those amphibious animals, the Venetians, you will forget what a good steed is. However, remember what I have offered you. Thank the stars, these Italian princes have a happy knack of quarrelling and fighting their differences out with any other swords than their own."

The following morning, after a most friendly and affectionate parting with the chivalric and true-hearted Sir John Hawkwood, Sir Giacinto Paoli and his squire resumed their journey to Florence.

CHAPTER II.

THE RENCONTRE.

THE Corsican knight was mounted on a very powerful horse of great spirit. In truth, it was necessary he should possess both spirit and bone to sustain the athletic frame of the rider, cased in the splendid but heavy armour of the period.

His squire, Pulini, the foster-brother of his father, and who was most devotedly attached to the son, was a strong muscular man—in age about forty-six, and extremely well-featured and skilled in arms, having served with the elder Paoli in many a battle-field. He was also well-armed and mounted. They continued their road for some time along the smiling banks of the Arno, till they reached the ferry. Having crossed the river, they pursued a well-beaten track as a shorter road by a league to Bosco. Pulini remonstrated at taking short cuts, but Paoli, remarking that the day was intensely hot and that the horses

seemed to suffer, proposed taking a road that ran along the side of a thick wood, which looked most inviting. They continued their journey under the shade of the wood, which seemed of great extent, rising to some height on one part. Round the base of the hill ran a clear sparkling stream. It was now about noon, and Paoli, to refresh and rest the horses, determined to halt for an hour under the shade and relieve them by letting them graze.

Having dismounted and looked round him, the squire observed, as he took his master's lance,—

“We have got out of the right track, signor. The old ferryman who induced us to cross the stream, by way of a short cut told us to keep the wood on our right, and the marsh on our left; and, by St. Anthony, we have, I see, reversed the direction.”

“So I thought,” returned Paoli, “when we turned to the left after passing the myrtle-grove. But it is very little matter; the day is long.”

Giacinto Paoli rambled up the mount to see if he could gain a view round its base. When half way up he heard the tinkling of bells, like those worn around the necks of mules. The sound came from the right, and seemed below him.

“Doubtless some travellers,” thought the knight, pushing his way through the myrtles till he gained a view down into a little vale or glen through which the rivulet ran. Beneath him, scattered over the greensward, was a large party of travellers, evidently reposing and refreshing themselves. The group that first attracted his attention was a party of five persons—three females and two males, among whom was an elderly dame, attired in the travelling costume of the times, her head divested of the enormous hood then worn. Amusing herself with adorning this good lady's head was a very young girl, who was forming wreaths of wild flowers, and, in a playful manner, placing them on the dame's head.

Paoli was not fifty paces above them, though concealed from observation by the myrtles. The face of this young maiden, though she was not more than fifteen, struck him forcibly from its exquisite loveliness. She was tall for her age; for, till she turned her sweet Hebe face towards him, he supposed, from her graceful figure and height, that she must be at least seventeen or eighteen years of age.

Giacinto gazed long and thoughtfully upon the fair face of the maiden; for his young life, passed from his very earliest years amid the wild strifes of his native land, had afforded but little time or ease either for the enjoyment of society or the cultivation of the limited accomplishments of that iron age. Still the Corsi-

can was ever an admirer of beauty, and, for the period in which he lived, he was an accomplished cavalier; especially as the years spent in Pisa, with the Grand Master of the Knights of St. Stephen, with whom he was a prodigious favourite, were not always passed in iron mail and in fierce strife.

The young girl was simply attired in white, having thrown aside a wide mantle and a large Tuscan straw hat. Opposite the old dame, who seemed to enjoy the young girl's playful fancy, sat an old, but hale and hearty, cavalero, who seemed to be intently occupied with the various articles of food spread out before him.

At a short distance from this party sat another. This latter consisted of fourteen or fifteen armed retainers, while several mules, a close litter, and fifteen stout roadsters were picketed about the vale, cropping the short sweet grass that grew on the banks of the rivulet.

While Paoli stood leaning against a tree, debating whether he should descend and accost the party below, his ear caught the jingling sound of armed riders coming from the other side of the abrupt hill or mound on which he stood. The party below also seemed to hear the sound, for the old cavalero laid down the cup he was drinking from and listened.

Passing to the other side, Paoli gained a spot from which both sides of the mount were visible. He then perceived the cause of the sound he had heard, and beheld about twenty armed riders beneath, watering their horses in the rivulet. By their arms and the crimson horse-hair flowing from their helmets, he surmised they were German Barbuti.

No Condottieri forces at that period were more superbly armed than the Barbuti. Over their mail coats of interlaced chain were cuirasses of highly-polished steel. The cuirasses, boots, and cuisses were of the same material, and shone equally with the rest of their bright array.

A little in advance of the troop rode a tall, powerful man, similarly armed, only that, instead of horse-hair, he wore a rich plume of crimson feathers in his casque. This cavalero rode a little in advance, so as to see round the angle of the mound.

As soon as he perceived the party we have described, he checked his horse and galloped back to his troop, who were tightening the girths of their saddles. Some words, which our hero did not hear, caused them at once to mount and follow their leader. But before this, Paoli, who guessed some mischief would come of the meeting of the Barbuti and the old cavalero, turned back to where he had left Pulini, and found his squire bridling his horse.

"Follow me as fast as you can, Pulini," said the knight, bracing on his casque and grasping his heavy lance. Without a word more, he galloped off round the mound.

"St. Anthony! what's the matter now?" muttered the squire (who well knew his master's impetuosity), tightening his own girths and preparing to follow.

In a few moments, Giacinto Paoli had turned the angle of the hill, his speed being increased by the shouts and cries that filled the air. As he came into view of the scene, he perceived that the Barbuti had assaulted the party which had so interested him. The females were grouped together in terror. Neither the old cavalero nor his retainers had had time to mount; but were clustered together, offering but a faint and certainly most ineffectual resistance to the mounted German freebooters. The loud shout of the Corsican knight, as he urged his strong horse to full speed, attracted at once the notice of the leader of the troop, who, turning round, lowered his lance, and spurred his steed to meet this fresh antagonist. He rode a heavy, though singularly powerful, German horse; but his opponent, celebrated for his power and skill with the lance, met him in full career; and though Paoli was shaken in his seat, and his horse staggered with the shock, he bore his assailant to the earth, with a mortal stroke of his lance through the neck, crashing with irresistible force through chain and mail.

Astounded and paralyzed by the fall of their leader—for he lay without the slightest motion on the sod—the Barbuti drew back, while several sprang from their horses and raised the fallen man; but life was quite extinct. The rest, with shouts of rage, hastened to revenge his death. By this time Pulini had arrived, sword in hand; and the old cavalero's men, taking advantage of the pause, hurried to their horses, mounted, and hastened to assist the knight. But Paoli had by this time dropped his lance, and, seizing his heavy battle-axe, beat one of the foremost of the Barbuti from his horse. Seconded bravely by his squire, they stood the brunt of the assault till the old cavalero and his followers rode up. The Barbuti then demanded a parley, finally consenting to retire if they should be permitted to carry off the body of their leader and their wounded comrades. They seemed to regard the power of the Corsican knight with surprise and rage, but evidently felt no desire to renew the strife.

Giacinto Paoli willingly acceded to this; and, making the request of the Barbuti known to the party, the old cavalero also assented.

Some of the troop then dismounted, and the body of their

leader, wrapped in a large mantle, being placed upon his horse, and the wounded assisted to remount, the whole party, without exchanging a word with their victors, rode slowly from the scene of their late contention.

No sooner had the Barbuti disappeared round the angle of the mound than the old cavalero turned towards the Corsican, who had dismounted, and was examining his steed.

“A thousand thanks, Sir Knight,” said he, “for your most opportune and gallant assistance. You have rescued yonder dear girl from the clutches of that incarnate fiend, Ludovico Guarnieri.”

“Guarnieri!” echoed Paoli, with a start of astonishment.

“Even so,” returned the signor, gazing with surprise upon the youthful features of the Corsican, who just then had raised his visor. “But we must away, Sir Knight. I will explain as we ride. You have slain, *per Bacco*, with a single thrust of your lance, one of the greatest pests in Italy, and accounted one of its best lances.”

“Then I have slain the son of Duke Guarnieri—*Corpo di mondi!*” muttered Paoli, as he followed the stranger towards the ladies. “It is remarkable, notwithstanding Sir John’s precaution, that I should have actually stumbled upon the party I was endeavouring to avoid.”

The old dame, now somewhat recovered from her terror, and assisted by the young maiden, on whom the eyes of Giacinto Paoli were bent with increased admiration, advanced to thank their deliverer. Both started back, equally surprised at seeing their rescuer so very young, his powerful and athletic frame, cased in mail, betokening a much more advanced age.

The old dame uttered her thanks with much feeling and emotion; but we much doubt if the sweet smile of the blushing girl, who held forth her taper fingers, which the Corsican pressed respectfully to his lips, and which brought the bright blood of the maiden to her cheeks and temples, was not a much richer reward than the eloquent harangue of the old dame.

The stranger, having now harnessed the horses to the litter, and arranged everything in order to resume their journey, approached, saying,—

“I trust, Sir Knight, we ride the same road. We journey to Livorno.”

“It grieves me to say,” returned Paoli, “that my direction is Florence.”

The stranger looked disappointed, but said,—

“Our road lies for nearly a league the same. You have strayed from your course, if, as I imagine, you came from Pisa.”

"I thought as much," replied the Corsican, as he mounted and rode on by the side of the old cavalero, who became very communicative.

He said his name was Sir Conrad Tolosino—that the old dame was his spouse, and the young maiden a distant relative committed to his care—that stopping for a week to recruit his spouse's strength, after a long journey, at Bosco, Ludovico Guarneri, who happened to halt there with his troop, beheld, by chance, his charge Agnes. This Ludovico was notorious for his profligacy, and his outrageous violation of the laws, which he set at defiance. He made several attempts while at Bosco to intrude upon the privacy of the old cavalero's retreat; but as there was a strong body of Florentine men-at-arms there, the leader of which was an old friend of Sir Conrad, Ludovico found it better to desist, and leave Bosco; and the old knight thought he had got rid of him. But the German secretly watched his prey, and would undoubtedly have carried off the maiden but for the unlooked-for assistance of the Corsican.

In a short time, the party reached the spot where their roads separated. The old knight and the two ladies took a friendly and grateful leave of their deliverer, Sir Conrad, hoping, if ever he passed within ten leagues of the Castle of Averni, which lay within a league of Livorno, that he would remember that it belonged to one who would ever consider himself his debtor.

The old dame gave him her hand to kiss; and it was remarked, afterwards, by the sly attendant of the young maiden, who also rode within the litter, that there was a marvellous difference between the kiss the Corsican bestowed upon the young maiden's fair hand, and that with which he favoured the hand of the ancient lady.

CHAPTER III.

DUKE GUARNIERI.

THE Corsican and his attendant, after their separation from Sir Conrad's party, pursued their journey for nearly a league in silence. The young knight was buried in thought—the image of the youthful Agnes was not likely to be forgotten; and he pictured to himself her beautiful and sylph-like form, rounded into womanhood, and brought to perfection by the passing of two or three years.

Very different were the ruminations of his squire, who was inwardly congratulating himself upon their safe extrication from a contest into which he had followed his master with

very little hope of victory—when he beheld the band of armed men whom his master had so madly, and without reason, as he conceived, attacked ; for Pulini was not aware of Sir Conrad's party being the cause of the contest.

In the midst of the squire's self congratulations, he was rather startled by hearing the sound of armed riders coming from behind.

Looking back, he perceived a cloud of dust in their rear rapidly approaching. With some vague apprehension of danger he rode to the side of his master, saying,—

“ There are armed riders behind, signor, coming up at a rapid pace.”

“ Travellers like ourselves, doubtless,” returned the knight, carelessly ; “ and if you look before you you will perceive a cloud of dust likewise. Recollect this is the public road between Florence and Pisa.”

“ By all the saints, signor ! ” anxiously exclaimed Pulini, “ we are beset. The fellows are Barbuti.”

The knight cast a look behind ; and true enough he now beheld a troop of German Barbuti, amounting to more than thirty men, very leisurely advancing towards them.

“ It's as well to be prepared,” exclaimed Paoli, pulling down the visor of his casque and grasping the lance Pulini held. “ They may be only a party returning to the camp of their leader.”

“ Signor, for the love of the Virgin, and by your hopes of ever serving our unhappy country, do not dream of forcing your way through such a force. We are caught in a snare—they are Barbuti coming down the road in our front.”

The squire was right ; for another troop of Germans rode rapidly towards them ; and in another moment Paoli and his squire were surrounded by a troop of above sixty men-at-arms.

Rash and headstrong as the Corsican was at times, he nevertheless checked his steed, and, throwing up his visor, quietly demanded of the leader of the band, who rode forward from the rest, the reason of his road being obstructed.

The German very coolly replied—they had orders from their leader, Duke Guarnieri, to bring the slayers of his noble son, dead or alive, into his presence.

“ It remains with yourself, Sir Knight,” quietly added the German, with a grim smile, “ which way you prefer being presented to our chief.”

The fiery blood of the Corsican knight flew to his cheek and temples at the threatening manner of the German, but resistance would have been madness. So, making a virtue of necessity, he said,—

“ You leave me no alternative. Lead on ; I will follow you. Though what your leader——”

“ *Der Teufel, Sir Knight !* ” interrupted the Barbuti, “ you take it easy. I suppose you imagine the Duke wishes to thank you for slaying his only son, to save a puny damsel from a supposed insult.”

“ Lead on, sir,” retorted Paoli, with an angry frown. “ I will answer your chief, and not bandy words with you.”

Having taken his sword and other arms, the knight and his squire were placed in the middle of the troop, and then their horses were urged into a smart trot.

Our hero’s thoughts were by no means pleasant. Having heard the character of Guarnieri from Sir John Hawkwood, he could expect nought but a stormy interview with the furious Duke. He regretted slaying his son ; but, had he not done so, he would probably have lost his own life. He had only done his duty in assisting Sir Conrad Tolosino ; he was bound in all honour to do so ; and he was not expected to know that the cavalo who met him so furiously in the onset was Duke Guarnieri’s son ; and even had he known it it would not in the least have altered his intention.

Branching off from the main road, they pursued a bridle-path, and after an hour’s ride they came in view of Duke Guarnieri’s encampment, which spread over a large extent of ground. Passing the outposts, they halted in the midst of the tents, and on alighting were surrounded by hundreds of fierce-looking Barbuti. Pulini looked serious and somewhat dismayed, though he only considered his master would be held to ransom.

“ Now, Sir Knight, follow me,” said the officer who commanded the troop that had captured Paoli ; “ you, Sir Squire, go with that page ; he will take care of you,” he added, with a grim smile.

Without uttering a word, Paoli followed the German to the entrance of an immense tent, before which paced a sentinel. It was now quite dusk, and, as the Barbuti threw back the folds of the tent, our hero perceived it was lighted within.

“ Enter, Sir Knight,” said the German, with a malignant leer, “ and any questions you may wish to ask will meet with a ready and quick answer.”

With nerves braced to meet the worst, Paoli entered the tent glancing with anxiety and curiosity over the wide space within, which was hung with scarlet drapery, and ornamented here and there by groups of arms and armour. From the summit swung a brass lamp with four lights in it. The first object, however, that particularly attracted his attention was the body of Ludovico Guarnieri, still in his armour, stretched in the rigidity of

death upon an oakcn table in the centre of the tent. From the dead body of the son, Paoli raised his eyes to the motionless, statue-like form of Duke Guarnieri. It was impossible to mistake his remarkable and majestic figure, which seemed scarcely to breathe, as he stood with his right hand resting on a ponderous battle-axe, while his dark piercing eyes were fixed in terrible meaning upon the youthful face and unshrinking gaze of the Corsican.

Guarnieri was cased in complete mail, excepting the casque : his cuirass bore the fearful inscription that has handed down to posterity a name hateful for the atrocities committed under it, in defiance of God and all human laws.

The Duke seemed evidently struck with the youthful look of his captive, contrasted with a figure and frame which even beside his own gigantic figure was remarkable for its noble proportions.

“They tell me, Sir Knight,” at length uttered the Duke—“for I see you are of knightly rank—that you met my son, fairly and without vantage, with the lance, and that you slew him. Now, *I* say, the villains lie.”

“Sir Duke,” returned the Corsican calmly, though his cheek was flushed, “they spoke the truth. I took no vantage of your son.”

“Tis false,” furiously interrupted the Duke. “Ludovico Guarnieri never fell by the thrust of a lance, met fairly man to man. There lives not the man who could slay my son thus.”

“Yet such was the case, Sir Duke.”

“False Italian, you lie !” roared Guarnieri, in a voice of thunder. “And for the accursed foul deed you have this day done, you die—and by the hand of the father.”

Grasping his huge axe, he was lifting it from the ground, when Paoli tore a weapon from the pillars and prepared to defend his life to the last. Suddenly the drapery across the tent was cast aside, and a female rushed forward and threw herself on the uplifted arm of the Duke.

“Stay your hand, my lord, I implore you !” exclaimed she, in a voice inexpressibly soft and sweet. “Not here—not in cold blood, my lord ! strike an unarmed captive ! Nay,” she imploringly added, as the Duke strove to free his arm from her grasp—“nay, for the love I have borne you through years of a stormy life, stain not your hand with the blood of a helpless captive.”

Giacinto Paoli stood in silent wonder and deep interest.

“Can it be possible,” he thought to himself, as he looked with admiration, and even reverence, upon the striking form of Hermengarde, the Duke’s consort—“can it be possible that

one so steeped in crime, so acted upon by furious passions, can retain the love of a woman thus animated by the noblest impulses?"

As Hermengarde ceased speaking, she leant her pale and marble brow against the iron-clad breast of her terrible husband. She appeared to shudder as she touched the steel which bore the fearful inscription on its surface. The arm of the Duke slowly relaxed its hold of the battle-axe, and the expression of his features softened, as he gazed down into the face of his sorely-tried spouse. Gently raising her head from his breast, he whispered some low words in her ear, and, taking her by the hand, led her to the curtain, behind which, drawing it aside, Hermengarde retired.

The Duke turned back, and looking the Corsican calmly in the face, said,—

"Had I slain you, Sir Knight, where you now stand, I should only have done that which any other father would do to him who deprived him of his only child. You have slain my son; whether by fair means or foul it now matters not. His body lies there before his father's sight, a lifeless mass of clay. I want not to hear of your mad notions of chivalry and knighthood. These are times when a man's sword has quite enough to do to serve its master, and not thrust itself, uncalled for, into other's quarrels. You cannot know what a father feels. But the deed is done; I trust to avenge my son's death."

"Be it so, Sir Duke," returned Paoli. "I fear no man in a just cause. I have, unfortunately, slain your son; but the act was one of self defence. Let me then stand before you in my knightly harness, and to God I leave the judgment."

A mocking laugh escaped the Duke's lips as he struck a steel cuirass suspended to one of the pillars of the tent with his gauntlet. Two esquires entered the tent.

"Take this signor," said the Duke, "and on your lives be his safe keepers. Let him have food and wine, and restore to him his arms. To-morrow, at sunrise, Sir Knight," he added, turning to Paoli, "I meet you in the field; and if, after the expiration of one turn of the glass, you should be still alive, you are free."

And waving his hand, the two esquires hurried Paoli from the tent.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMBAT.

CONSIDERABLY astonished at the termination of an interview that had threatened his life so nearly, Giacinto Paoli followed the two squires from the pavilion, passing through groups of wondering Barbuti, till they came to the entrance of a tent before which a sentry was stationed.

To his infinite joy, our hero beheld within the tent his squire Pulini, whose delight was great at again beholding his young master.

Here the squires left the knight without uttering a single word.

While Giacinto was giving the amazed Pulini an account of his interview with the Duke, a young page entered the tent, carrying a salver stored with refreshment. He was a very fair and handsome boy, with a melancholy cast of feature.

“Sir Knight,” said the youth, placing the salver upon the table, “a solitary chance of life has been given you. It is, alas ! a poor one, strong and powerful as you look. The same chance has been given to others ; but in half the time allowed they ceased to breathe. But you are stronger of limb and stouter of heart than any I have yet seen contend with our leader. My mistress desires not your death, though you have killed her son. Ah, Sir Knight, if you but knew the kind, soft woman’s heart our Duchess has, you would wonder”—and the page spoke in a very low tone—“how so fiendish a spirit could exist in a son of hers. But, as I said, you have one chance of life. In your contest with the Duke, make no manner of attempt to hurt or wound him, even if it were possible that such an event could occur. Our leader’s favourite weapon is the battle-axe. Prolong the fight if you can, but beware how you receive one single blow. No man ever required a second. Farewell, Sir Knight! From my heart I wish you well quit of this, in truth, terrible trial ; for, as my mistress said, your peril arises from your having protected her sex, and your death could not restore her son to life.”

“Thanks, fair page,” said our hero, “both for your wish and your advice. Bear, I beseech you, my deep gratitude to your noble lady. Sorry am I, to the heart, that my hand was forced to do a deed that has brought affliction and sorrow to her gentle heart.”

When the page retired Pulini, who had listened with great interest, exclaimed,—

“ Now by the mass, signor, this is a good turn of fortune. The false pride of this cursed Duke, if his plighted word is to be depended on, will win you the contest. Neither his gigantic height, nor his infernal battle-axe, will give him the victory, if you, signor, will only keep your temper and be content to stand, as the page said, on the defensive. His enormous axe will weary him, while your activity will defeat his brute strength.”

Pulini spoke cheerfully, for he knew his master's extraordinary power and skill, but he dreaded his fiery temper.

Paoli felt no fear whatever, nor, indeed, much anxiety. He lived in an iron age, where existence was hourly risked, and from his cradle to manhood his life had been one of peril.

“ Come, Pulini, this wine and food are not to be despised. We have eaten nothing since morning, and there is no fighting with an empty stomach. You see, after all, his Satanic majesty is not quite so black as he is represented.”

So, dividing with his dagger a very tempting pasty, he commenced satisfying the cravings of an exceedingly healthy appetite. Pulini, having done the same, proceeded to disarm his master, in order to examine each rivet and strap of his armour.

While the squire was thus busy, Paoli paced the narrow limits of his tent, immersed in thought. Amidst the many images and ideas that floated before his mind's eye was that of the lovely stranger, whose name he had heard was Agnes. But, Agnes what?—he knew not.

“ I shall never behold her again,” thought Giacinto, “ and perhaps it is better it should be so, as I have little besides my sword to win my way to fortune. An exile from my beloved country, deprived of kindred and home, my countrymen groaning under the oppression of an iron rule, with, alas! scarcely any hope of casting off the cruel yoke binding them.”

Such, and many more equally painful thoughts, tormented the young knight for a time, till his squire persuaded him to seek a few hours' repose on a simple couch of dried rushes and fern spread in one corner of the tent. Upon this he threw himself; and, notwithstanding his thoughts and the trial of the morrow before him, fell into a sound sleep, from which he was roused by the entrance of one of the Duke's squires, who was greatly surprised at the Corsican knight being able to enjoy sleep when he considered his life not worth an hour's purchase.

Placing Paoli's sword and battle-axe on the table, the squire said,—

“ My lord will be ready for the contest in half an hour, and desires to know if you require any other weapon.”

“ Tell your master I thank him,” returned the knight, taking up, with evident pleasure, his own good sword. “ This has served me long and faithfully. It is a plain weapon, but none better was ever held in the hand of a soldier. As soon as I arm, I shall be ready for your master.”

The squire retired with a significant smile on his features, while Pulini, looking serious and thoughtful, began arming his young master.

Paoli hastily broke his fast from the materials of the last night's meal, and, drinking a cup of wine, was quite ready when the Duke's squire returned, requesting him to follow. Pulini took up his master's battle-axe and accompanied them, no notice whatever being taken of his proceedings.

It was a bright and glorious day, and the sun, as it rose above the hills that backed the camp of Guarneri, threw a flood of brilliant light into the vale below, and upon the steel-clad forms of countless men.

The young knight followed his guide through several ranks of silent soldiers, who, ranged in regular order, were drawn up to witness one of those sights which their leader was so proud of exhibiting to them. They were evidently struck with the noble bearing and fine stature of the Corsican, whose calm and handsome features, and glowing cheek, showed no signs of uneasiness.

Courage and gallant deeds in that iron age always commanded respect, even from the rudest breast. Excepting by his own personal squires and followers, Ludovico Guarneri had been much disliked. Equally cruel and ferocious as his sire, he failed to win the love of the fierce Barbuti, for his nature was grasping and avaricious ; and he manifested a proud and haughty indifference towards his men. His father, on the contrary, with all his vices, was lavish and profuse, fairly and affably sharing any spoil with his meanest soldier. Proud of his skill and extraordinary strength, he always joined in the rough sports of his men, defeating with ease any four of the strongest amongst them in any feats requiring bodily power.

Therefore, as the Corsican knight passed along the iron ranks of the Barbuti, not a few of them secretly wished that he might be able to prolong the combat the turning of a glass. As to any injury to their chief, they thought that quite impossible.

A wide space was left encircled by the troops ; and in the

middle of this stood Duke Guarnieri, leaning on his immense battle-axe. Near him was the fair-faced page, holding a half-hour glass.

To say that Giacinto's heart did not beat somewhat quicker when he beheld the majestic figure of his antagonist, cased from head to heel in his impenetrable proof mail, would be scarcely possible. Still he was perfectly self-possessed. The visor of the Duke's helmet was up ; and his dark and vengeful glance rested upon the features of our hero with a terrible look of hatred and revenge.

A perfect silence reigned amid the thousands looking on.

The Duke, approaching close to his antagonist, and speaking sufficiently loud for every individual around to hear his words, said,—

“ You are, I understand, a knight honourable of the order of San Stefano, therefore an antagonist worthy of my arm : that your brethren may hereafter hear that you received fair and honourable terms, I now ask whether you have any demand to make before we begin this duel. I have plighted my word, and I now repeat it—that if you survive after the sand of that glass has run out, you are free to leave my camp. It is just that a father should revenge his son's death ; therefore I challenge you. And that it may not hereafter be said that Guarnieri forced his captive to stand up to be slaughtered, I leave you now the choice to quit my camp unscathed, bearing with you a father's curse and a coward's name.”

Every word the Duke uttered was clear and distinct ; and though his eyes flashed with passion, and Paoli could see that the hand that rested on his battle-axe shook with emotion, yet his voice was sonorous and clear as a bell.

As he ceased speaking, a murmur of applause rose from amidst the ranks.

“ I have but one request to make, Sir Duke,” replied the Corsican ; “ and that is, that my squire may be permitted—should it be my fate to fall in the combat—to quit your camp unmolested. As to your offer that I may leave it without meeting you in this duel, I utterly reject and scorn it ; not from the fear of coward being attached to the name of a Knight of St. Stefano ; for, thank God, I have established too good a character amongst my brethren to be tarnished by refusing a contest even with Duke Guarnieri. You have forcibly taken me captive, contrary to all law ; and for this act I now defy you before your assembled troops. I came not here to comply with your terms and gratify your pride by an empty pageant. I defy you to mortal combat, and let him who first draws blood be the victor, to do as he thinks fit with the vanquished.”

"Madman!" almost roared the easily excited Duke, "I accept your conditions." Then, with a mocking laugh, he turned to his men. "You hear this fool-hardy and mad knight. For certain reasons, I gave him a chance of life. He despises it, and defies me. And by the power he adores, he dies. Begone, boy!" he exclaimed to the page; and, closing the visor of his casque with an angry gesture, he stepped a pace back and grasped his battle-axe.

Pulini's heart sank within him. "I knew it," he murmured to himself; "his haughty spirit has revolted against the idea of owing his life to mere artifice. Ah! Saint Anthony, the race of the Paolis, I fear me, perishes!—for that incarnate fiend will never spare him, even if he should first draw blood."

In the meantime Paoli carefully closed his visor and grasped his sword, one of great weight and exquisite temper.

And then commenced a combat between two men much better matched than any one present could surmise. Paoli's chief object was to avoid a direct blow from so terrible a weapon as the Duke fought with. Infinitely more active, and wielding a weapon much less fatiguing, the Corsican for several moments baffled every effort of the Duke to bring down his axe on his casque. Then, indeed, it became very evident to the soldiers assembled that had the combat depended on the turning of a half-hour glass, Paoli could easily have prolonged the time.

The young page had not retired more than a few paces from the combatants, and stood watching the fight with intense anxiety. Baffled and astounded, Guarnieri began to lose his self-possession. As yet our hero had struck no blow. The Duke, though perfectly unwearyed, was getting furious, for he struck with greater rapidity, forcing Paoli at times to interpose his sword—which he did, however, with great caution.

At length a blow, partly stopped by the Corsican's sword, alighted sideways upon his casque, tearing away crest and plume, and causing Giacinto to stagger under its force.

A murmur now ran through the ranks; and Pulini involuntarily advanced a step or two. The Duke uttered a savage oath, and pressed on his antagonist fiercely, and somewhat unwarily; for Paoli's blood was roused, and, for the first time, he struck the Duke a tremendous blow full upon the side of his casque, causing him to stagger back a pace or two. The Barbuti were amazed; and before Guarnieri, who grasped his axe with both hands, could recover his guard, a second blow severed the fastenings of his casque, leaving his head unprotected, and inflicting a gash, though slight, on his neck, from which the blood spouted over his mail.

When he saw the blood Giacinto Paoli drew back. But Guarnieri, frantic with rage and disappointed vengeance, and forgetful of his plighted word, had grasped his axe, and was rushing forward, when the young page, receiving a sign from some unseen hand, darted forward, exclaiming,—

“Your plighted word! your plighted word, my Lord Duke!” And, pale as death, he sank upon his knees.

“Ah, accursed meddler and fool!” roared the Duke; “do you dare to stay my hand? take your reward.”

The next instant the brains of the unfortunate page would have been dashed out, had not the sword of Paoli turned the stroke aside. The weapon was broken in several pieces, but the page was saved.

Quick as thought, the Duke turned like a baited bull; and again raising his axe, with a horrid laugh, shouted,—

“Now die! Accursed Italian, die!”

But quicker even than his words was the spring Pulini made to the side of the furious Duke, interposing his master’s battle-axe between the descending weapon and the unshrinking Corsican. The blow beat the axe from the squire’s hand, knocking him senseless at his master’s feet. The temper of his head-piece alone saved his life.

All was now confusion; for a universal shout from the Barbuti of “Your word, Duke! Your plighted word, Duke! Blood has been drawn!” filled the air.

Heedless of all, Paoli kneeled down, and supported the head of his faithful squire who, fortunately, was only stunned; while Guarnieri stood as if changed into a statue, the foam of rage covering his lips, and the unchecked blood from the gash in his neck running down his cuirass in front.

“Begone from my camp!” at last burst from the livid lips of the infuriated German. “Some sorcery has aided your arm. But begone, while yet I can restrain my rage, for, by Heaven, if you stand before me yet another minute, I will put you to a death of torture!”

What our hero might have replied we know not; but many of the Barbuti, with the father of the fair page whose life he had saved—one of the Duke’s officers—interposed, and actually forced the Knight and his squire from the spot. The Duke remained standing there, as if in a dream.

“Sir Knight,” said the father of the page, leading our hero from the field, “you are a brave and gallant man—you saved my poor boy’s life, and your own would have been sacrificed by the act; for once his blood is shed, our leader loses his reason. Yours was a rash and daring defiance, but you are saved. They are saddling your horses. If you will accept

this rough weapon," offering his own iron-hilted blade, "till you get a better, you will gratify me."

Paoli thanked the rough, but grateful German; and, seeing their horses brought forth, and Pulini able to mount, he lost no more time in words; but, thanking Providence internally for his most unlooked-for escape—for, in truth, he scarcely expected it—he threw himself on his horse. As he did so, the fair page of Hermengarde pressed to his side, and, taking his hand, kissed it, saying, in a very low voice,—

"Do not take the road to Florence—you will be waylaid by Hugo de Hermstadd, the squire, and most devoted of all Ludovico's personal followers."

"Thanks, gentle boy," returned Paoli, as he kissed his open brow. Then shaking the hard hand of the German officer, he spurred his steed up the ascent from the camp of Guarnieri, and soon came out on a bridle-road, which he was told would lead him into the great Florentine thoroughfare to Livorno, their port, at that period, for the outlet of their rapidly-increasing commerce.

Pulini, though still smarting under the effect of the stunning blow he had received—not from the battle-axe of the furious Guarnieri, for that would have been death—but from the handle of the weapon he had interposed to save his master's life—which, beaten back, had struck him down, was overjoyed at finding his master clear of the German camp, alive and unhurt.

Paoli himself felt elated, though anxious that his squire should not over-exert himself. Accordingly, instead of pursuing the road to Florence, he took the way to Bosco, a fortified town belonging to the Florentines, distant only a league. There he resolved to remain for a couple of days.

CHAPTER V.

THE BROTHERS.

ABOUT fifteen miles to the eastward of Bastia, in Corsica, lies the very singular and picturesque island of Capraja. Though, viewed from a distance, it appears nothing more than a dark speck upon the wide waters that encircle it, and though only about fifteen miles in circumference, it yet has a most spacious and safe harbour; and its single town, containing, at the period of our story, above three thousand five hundred inhabitants, belonged to a Corsican family of the name of Damari. At the time of the first invasion of Corsica, the race of Damari possessed considerable property in the island; but Corsica being

conquered, their fiefs were seized ; and the last male branch of the Damaris, Filippo Guiseppe, Marchese Damari, then a very young man—stripped of his Corsican fiefs—fled to Capraja, the last of his feudal tenures. But the limits of this little island being too confined for the taste of the young Marchese, he passed over into Italy, and joined the Crusaders. After spending five years in Palestine, he returned to Italy, married the wealthy heiress of a Siennese noble, and intended to fix his residence on the peninsula. But some years after the great pestilence broke out, and soon spread over the fair fields of the South with an appalling spirit of desolation. Every one fled ; amongst the rest the Crusader and his bride, who sought, in their little neglected fief of Capraja, a refuge from the plague, which was sweeping from the earth a third of its inhabitants. The young wife, of a retiring and quiet disposition, was delighted with the romantic beauties of this truly singular isle, and pleased with the society of the few Corsican signori who had retired there with their families to breathe the air of freedom, so dear to them.

The island was totally inaccessible, except in front of the town, which was seated on the land-locked bay that formed its harbour. The Marchese, resolving to defend this last stronghold of Corsica from the Genoese, should they attempt its subjugation, built the fortress protecting the narrow entrance to the harbour, also one or two towers, as look-outs, in elevated situations.

After nineteen years of wedded life, the Crusader became a widower, with two sons, and, six years subsequently, he followed his beloved consort. His eldest son, Guiseppe, was at that period five-and-twenty ; and Bartolomeo, the youngest, eighteen years of age. Never were two brothers more dissimilar in disposition, and yet both were amiable and much loved by the little community of Capraja. Guiseppe, who succeeded to the title and property of his father, was of a somewhat singular and eccentric disposition ; his thoughts or his wishes never roamed beyond the narrow limits of his island ; he courted its solitude ; he loved every foot of ground within its boundaries ; he was proud of his long line of unblemished descent ; but his pride never gave offence, for he was kind and liberal to those about him. For the period in which he lived, he was singularly learned, and passed much of his time in a costly library procured from Rome, containing many valuable manuscripts.

Bartolomeo, the younger, was the reverse of his brother. Having a social disposition, and an ardent mind, he panted to see the world ; and though he loved his brother dearly, he felt

that the little island and its simple inhabitants formed too narrow a circle for his buoyant and change-loving disposition. He had imbibed some of his brother's taste for reading ; but in how different a manner was that taste directed ! Bartolomeo perused with avidity the chronicles of Venice, Florence, and Pisa ; he read of the wealth and energy of their merchant nobles ; of their settlements in the East ; their colonies ; the stores of wealth gained by honourable traffic, and the vast benefits their people derived from their daring enterprises.

Bartolomeo would sometimes converse with his brother on those subjects ; but the latter curled his lip with scorn at the mention of commerce—those “slaves of gold,” as he styled the merchants of Venice, Pisa, and Florence. The younger Damari, on the contrary, designated them as men befitting mankind by their industry and speculation—spreading knowledge and arts amongst their countrymen—creating a bustling, happy, and cheerful population—and, in the end, raising monuments of power and splendour, which the lapse of ages have not, as yet, had the power to destroy.

The Marchese Damari married the exiled daughter of a noble Corsican, who had sought refuge on the island. The Marchesa was young, handsome, amiable, and Bartolomeo rejoiced in his brother's happiness. But he lost his cheerfulness, and, without a companion, would roam about the island for hours, his eyes being fixed upon the blue hills of distant Italy.

“I cannot,” he would exclaim, as his gaze rested on these hills—“I cannot pass a whole life here. It is impossible. Capraja is too still, too tranquil and monotonous. Every day is but the repetition of the past. No change—no bustle of active life. I will tell Guiseppe that I must seek my fortune on a foreign soil.”

And Bartolomeo did speak his wishes to Guiseppe. The Marchese looked mournfully in his brother's face for a time before he spoke. And then he said all a kind and affectionate brother could say to dissuade Bartolomeo from his projects—but in vain.

“A Damari turn to the paltry trade of buying and selling, God knows what !” exclaimed the Marchese.

“Nay, Guiseppe,” said Bartolomeo, with spirit, “the nobles of Liguria and of Pisa think it no disgrace that their galleys, loaded with the produce of other climes, bring them wealth, and enable them to erect habitations fit for princes. What was Venice, till her commerce and her industry made her all glorious as she is ?”

But Guiseppe, like his sire, the Crusader, was an enemy to trade : he was not to be convinced. He made no reply to his

brother, but left the room. In a few minutes, however, he returned, and laid upon the table two weighty bags of gold, with a written order for a large sum on a wealthy merchant in Pisa.

“There, my beloved brother,” said he, solemnly but affectionately, “there is twice the portion left you by our good father. Should you require it, Bartolomeo, you can have as much more. Take it, and thy elder brother’s blessing. But one thing I must request ; namely, that while your foot rests upon the soil of the Continent, the name of Damari must be forgotten. Any other will do,” he added, somewhat bitterly, “any other will do to be plundered, deceived, and”—he paused ; then added, more kindly, “but not disgraced. Go, brother ! And should you become destitute or friendless, remember you have, if he lives, an affectionate brother, and, in Capraja, always a home.”

The brothers parted.

The young adventurer landed on the Continent of Italy, proceeded to Pisa, and lodged his money in the famous bank of that city.

It is not our intention, nor is it necessary, to follow the fortunes of the young Caprese at this period of our story. We shall meet him again when age had tempered and calmed the enthusiasm of his disposition. He had proved that the world was not all smiles, but had a fair proportion of frowns. Still, he had not quarrelled with it, but, even after middle age, had yet to learn and to feel its worst trials. We leave him now, and return to Giacinto Paoli, who was proceeding on his journey to Venice about twenty-six years after Bartolomeo Damari’s departure from Capraja.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VENETIAN MERCHANT.

To avoid a long and tedious journey, Paoli proceeded to Rimini ; and, having disposed of his steeds, hired a small speronella to carry him and his squire to Venice.

The voyage up the Adriatic—that most uncertain of all seas as to storms and calms—was, however, prosperous ; and the third day he came within sight of the sea-girt city—the Adriatic Queen. The wind had been extremely light the whole day ; and as the speronella cautiously threaded her course through the narrow and intricate lagunes, the knight and his squire had full leisure to contemplate a scene truly unequalled for singularity and splendour.

On the walls of the then noble arsenal of Venice, the standard of the Lion—

“ Which through fire
And blood she bore o'er subject earth and sea,”

blew out proudly in the gentle breeze. There stood the city on its hundred isles, with its domes, spires, towers, pillars, and palaces—its lake-like sea, covered with innumerable merchant craft of every size and rig then known. As the speronella glided past the arsenal, the busy hum of the workmen, the clank of iron, and the creaking of the vast cranes, fell distinctly on the ear. At that period, three thousand workmen were employed in the arsenal. What would be the sensations of a Dandolo or a Faliero could either of those doges rise from his tomb and cast a momentary glance, in these days, upon the scene of their former pride and triumph ? Alas ! the name of Venice alone remains, and the memory of the glorious past.

The speronella came to an anchor ; and, in less than an hour, Paoli and his squire, with his mails, were landed at an hostelleria called the Dalmatian Arms.

On the following morning, Giacinto desired Pulini to hail a gondola, as it was his intention to visit his father's early and well-beloved friend. Giacinto had passed but a very sleepless night : he had much to reflect on : he was young, and the world was before him ; and he possessed sufficient funds to enable him to live—without risking his independence. He did not doubt of a kind reception from the Venetian merchant, of whose disposition and generosity of heart he had heard much from his father. He had seen him once—just before he quitted the College of Pisa ; and he felt perfectly satisfied he should remember the Venetian. Would he remember him ? Eight or nine years make but little alteration in the appearance of a man of middle age ; but the sudden springing of youth into manhood is a change indeed.

Placing upon his finger the ring bestowed by the merchant on his father, Giacinto prepared for his visit.

“ There is a young gondolier dwelling in this house, signor, who is ready to attend you,” said Pulini, returning. “ Our host speaks highly of him ; but, in sooth, his honest and intelligent face is as good a character as one would wish—.”

“ Are you beginning to study the human countenance, Pulini ? ” asked Paoli with a smile, “ though your first reading was a failure. You remember you said if ever there was a fellow inclined to do a black act, that Barbuti called Red Werter

was the man. Yet his heart, though cased in a very rough exterior, was a kind one."

"I was wrong there, signor, I confess," replied Pulini; "still I don't give up my intended study. I would rather rely on a character taken from a man's face than from the lips of another."

"Well, well, Pulini, in future wanderings we shall, no doubt, have sufficient opportunity of testing this scheme of judging of our fellow-man by his features. But now for this gondolier."

As Paoli entered the gondola, he was struck with the open and intelligent countenance of the Venetian—a very young man.

"Where would the signor please to go?" inquired the youth, as with a vigorous and graceful sweep of his oar he impelled the boat into the middle of the canal.

"You are acquainted with the name of Tiepolo, no doubt," said the knight; "I wish to land as near the door of the merchant's palace as possible."

"At the very door, signor, you shall be landed. There is no name better known in Venice, or nobler perhaps than the Marchese Tiepolo," replied the gondolier, urging his boat forwards.

"The Signor Tiepolo has been ennobled then?" questioned the Corsican. "When did he receive his dignity?"

"Some time after the great pestilence, signor, I believe," replied the gondolier. "It seems the coffers of St. Mark were exhausted; and the noble merchant freely bestowed part of his wealth to save the people of Venice from starvation. The senate, signor, bestowed an empty title (one, I believe, that formerly belonged to the family); the people of Venice gave a blessing from their hearts."

The Corsican was struck with the manner and tone of the gondolier, whose accent was not that of a Venetian. There was something altogether in the youth that interested our hero, and, looking him in the face, he said,—

"You are not, I judge, a native of Venice."

"No, signor, no; thanks to St. Nicholas, I claim the wild hills of the Tyrol as my birthplace. I fled my country, signor," he added in a low voice, and his eyes flashed, "to avoid *one* tyrant, and here I have stumbled on *ten*—but, signor, here is the grand canal. The signor is, I perceive, a stranger to Venice. This is one of the wonders of this wonderful city. Yonder is the bridge of the Rialto."

Giacinto, like every one who has visited Venice, was struck and surprised by the novelty of every object that surrounded him. Countless gondolas shot along the surface of the smooth

water. The noble, and, at times, magnificent palaces that lined each side of the canal—the imposing front of the ducal palace—its noble colonnades—the red columns—the Piazzetto of St. Mark—were all objects of wonder and admiration.

Gliding from the grand canal into one much narrower, the gondolier arrested his boat alongside a flight of steps leading to the portico of a spacious mansion.

“This is the Palazzo Tiepolo, signor. Shall I await your return?”

Paoli manifested a wish to retain the gondolier in his service while in Venice. The youth's dark eyes flashed with pleasure as he expressed his gratitude.

Ascending the steps, Paoli entered beneath the colonnaded front ; and on requesting to see the Marchese Tiepolo, one of the domestics summoned the usher. A respectable personage in black then appeared, and, having received our hero's name, conducted him through a noble hall, and up a marble staircase of magnificent proportions, with alcoves, or niches, on each landing-place, filled with marble statues, exquisitely sculptured. Thence he passed along a spacious corridor, and was shown into a saloon, evidently the one used by the family as a withdrawing room.

The major domo then retired, saying he would inform the Marchese of his wish to see him.

The Corsican cast a casual glance around. The jalousies were down, and the windows open to admit the cool and pleasant breeze ; for the day was sultry, and a soft and subdued light fell upon each object in the room.

Many of the luxuries of the east adorned the apartment. The then rare and costly mirrors, the manufacture of Venice, hung in splendid frames from the walls ; the tables were covered with various articles of female use and taste ; in a corner stood a harp ; on an ottoman lay a lute, music, and embroidery.

Seeing some portraits suspended from the wall, the knight approached to gain a nearer view. There were four : the first he looked upon he immediately recognized as the Marchese. Two smaller ones next attracted his attention : they were the portraits of two young and beautiful girls in the Venetian costume. The first glance caused him to give a start of surprise ; he imagined he beheld the portrait of the fair and youthful maiden he had rescued from the grasp of Ludovico Guarnieri—a second glance, however, proved to him that, however strong the resemblance, it was not the portrait of Agnes, for the colour of the hair, the eyes, the age—all differed. Yet he felt the likeness was striking.

While pondering over this strange resemblance, the door opened, and the Marchese Tiepolo entered the saloon. Advancing, he embraced Giacinto with paternal kindness; welcomed him to Venice; and insisted on his instantly taking up his abode in the palace. Without paying the slightest attention to Giacinto's efforts to speak, he summoned the major domo, and dispatched two of his domestics to bring his young visitor's mails; and, before night, the Corsican and his squire were completely established in a handsome suite of apartments. Before a week had expired, Giacinto felt more at home in the amiable family of the Marchese than a year of intercourse would warrant.

Paoli had a long and interesting conversation with the Marchese, who listened to his brief tale with much emotion. He mourned deeply over the fate of his early friend; and, as he pressed the hand of the young knight, and his gaze rested upon the ring, the token of past friendship, his eye glistened, and he vowed he would be a second father to the youth. Giacinto stated his wishes, and his intention of entering into the service of Venice.

"Of that, my young friend," said the Marchese, "we will talk another time. Be in no hurry. You must look about you first, and know something about us. Of this be assured; anything you wish, and that my interest, which is not trifling, with the rulers of Venice, can procure, shall be yours. I owe your lamented father a life. Let me prove my gratitude to the son. As God has not blessed *me* with a son, you must be one to me, though I am proud of the two sweet girls Heaven has bestowed upon me."

Having established our hero and his squire in the palazzo of the Marchese, we will briefly describe the Venetian merchant and his family, with whom the Corsican was already a prodigious favourite.

The Marchese Tiepolo was at this period in his fifty-fourth year—and still a fine and stately-looking figure, with handsome features, clearly defining, by their mild and benevolent expression, the nobleness of his character. Notwithstanding the immense sacrifices he had made to the State in order to relieve his countrymen, after their dreadful sufferings during the great pestilence, and the famine that followed—at the period of Giacinto Paoli's visit to Venice, Tiepolo was accounted one of the richest merchants in that city of wealth.

The Marchesa was of the noble house of Pisani, and eight or ten years younger than her lord. She was still a woman of fascinating manners, and, though not remarkable for beauty, her countenance was extremely pleasing.

Her daughters were accounted two of the fairest amid the maidens of Venice.

The eldest, Julia, was betrothed to a Venetian noble of large fortune, and one of the Council of Forty, Count Michaello Steno, well known in Venetian history as the writer of a *pasquinade* that cost the Doge Falieri his life.

The youngest, Paulina, then in her eighteenth year: it was her portrait that had so forcibly reminded the Corsican of the young Agnes. The Lady Paulina, at the time of Paoli's visit, was the pride and reigning toast of Venice.

The sisters were perhaps equally beautiful, though their style of beauty differed. Julia was rather below the middle height, of a slight but graceful figure: her manner, though cheerful, and, at times, animated, was in general somewhat silent and reserved. Paulina's figure was above the ordinary height of her sex. She was full of life and vivacity; the very thoughts of her heart were to be read in her speaking and beautiful eyes. In person she was graceful and easy, though much fuller proportioned than her sister; and in disposition, feeling, and generosity, she resembled her father.

Paulina had as many lovers as there were cavaleros in Venice; but the maiden's heart was so light, her spirits were too vivacious to allow that unruly and impatient Cupid to make any impression on them.

Such was the family of the Marchese Tiepolo.

Week passed after week, till several months had run rapidly over, and, as yet, the Corsican had made no effort to enter the service of Venice, though a powerful fleet was then preparing in the arsenal for an expedition to the East. It was not that a life of idleness and pleasure accorded with the taste or inclination of the exile: far from it; he loved, in his heart, the excitement of arms, and ardently longed for active employment. But the Marchese, day after day, when he alluded to the subject, put him off, saying,—

“You must not be in a hurry, or I shall say you are tired of us. Only wait till this galley I am building is finished, and I will talk to you on the subject.”

One evening, Giacinto had accompanied the Marchese to a beautiful villa he was completing on the little island of Gino, in the lagunes. They sat enjoying the delicious breeze that swept over the still waters—beneath the verandah—gazing on the glories of a magnificent sunset. Venice lay directly opposite. Even the hum of its busy and enormous population came faintly across the sleeping waters. Innumerable gondolas, and several stately galleys, reposed listlessly upon the lagune. Gay parties were amusing themselves in gaudily decorated

barques ; for the sweet voices of Venetian maidens, combined with guitar and lute, came melodiously to the ear.

" Well, my dear young friend," said the Marchese, laying his hand on the shoulder of the abstracted Corsican, " what think you now of Venice and its pleasures ? Does it realize the dreams and anticipations of boyhood ? Do you remember the hundred questions you asked me in Pisa concerning the Adriatic Queen ? "

" It does—and it does not, my kind friend," returned the knight, rousing himself from a dreamy thought, in which the vision of the unknown Agnes was strangely mingled with Paulina Tiepolo ; " probably in youth we look upon everything with a magnifying glass. As we advance in life, the charm of many things is lessened as the imagination gets sobered. But in truth, Marchese, I have nought to say against Venice or its pleasures. Still—"

" I see how it is, Giacinto," interrupted the Marchese, with a smile, " you are not exactly the kind of man to while away youth and manhood in pursuit of pleasure. That herculean frame of thine was formed for nobler purposes. The life you now lead is a striking contrast to the stirring scenes of past years, and you feel it even more perhaps, than you are aware of —your wish is to serve under our banner in this war with your old enemies, the Genoese. This is easily accomplished ; still I do not think you would like to be bound in your time of service. The fleet now fitting out to cruise against the galleys of Genoa will be one of the finest that ever sailed the waters of the Adriatic. The Genoese galleys are now blockading the mouth of the Don. They have captured every Venetian vessel that has attempted to enter. Two of my galleys, with rich cargoes, bound for Byzantium, and consigned to my partner, a very wealthy Venetian merchant, of the name of Alviano, were captured and condemned. It is the custom of merchants, and even nobles, of Venice and Genoa, to build and equip war galleys, which are manned sometimes by volunteers, and often commanded by the younger sons of our nobility. These galleys have a protection from the State. When in company, they obey the orders of the Venetian admiral. A certain portion of all prizes taken goes into the coffers of St. Mark. In the present fleet there are six galleys fitting out by our young nobility, the most conspicuous of whom is the gallant Count Otho Palavicino. Young Pisani, with whom you have become so intimate, also commands a very fine and stately galley ; his father is appointed admiral of the entire fleet. Now I ardently wish you, if it suits your views, to take the command of the fine galley I am now ready to launch. You have often said

she is a noble model : she shall be second to none in equipment. With a fine crew, two of my best pilots, and volunteers, you will have more than you require ; and for the prizes you take we share equally," added the Marchese.

Not allowing Paoli to put in a word—struck as he was by the noble and generous proposal of the Venetian—the Marchese continued to explain his offer.

"Admiral Pisani," said he, "to whom I have already mentioned the subject, engages to procure you a protection from the senate, rarely granted to a foreigner. Now, my dear boy, I know this will suit your views, for you mentioned the other day, to Count Steno and young Pisani, your wish to serve on board a vessel in this fleet—besides," added he, with a pleased smile, and pressing the hand of the youth, "I am at the same time serving myself."

Giacinto smiled.

"A fact, I assure you," continued the Marchese. "I intend to share in the prizes you take, which you will consign to the Signor Alviano, in Byzantium. He will know what to do with them. You see this will be a joint concern between us—so all is settled. We will say no more of this now. The fleet sails after the festivities to be given on the occasion of this strange marriage of our aged Doge, Marino Faliero. His young and beautiful bride is scarcely eighteen, and he is eighty."

"A fearful disparity of years," observed Paoli, as he and the Marchese entered the gondola.

"A union [that will lead to sorrow," returned the Marchese, in a low tone. "Marino Faliero is a good and a great man, and was a stout-hearted soldier. He served Venice in his youth with his best blood. Still our Doge is hot of temper, somewhat imperious, and jealous to excess."

"Bad qualities," remarked the knight, "to ensure happiness with a young and beautiful bride."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SISTERS AND COUSIN.

AMONGST the many nobles and cavaleros who frequented the Palazzo Tiepolo, Giacinto early distinguished and formed a close intimacy with Count Steno, the betrothed of Julia, and Orsini Pisani, both young men of generous and upright principles, though very different in manner and character. Count Steno was much attached to his intended, notwithstanding their wide dissimilarity of character. The Count had an unceasing fund of gaiety in his disposition, with a quick but for-

giving temper. He was accounted the wittiest noble in Venice ; indeed, in his love of satire he, at times, indulged too freely.

The Count became greatly attached to the Corsican, who was a general favourite with the frequenters of the Tiepolo palace. Steno was a keen observer of those around him ; he felt a real and brotherly affection for the beautiful Paulina, and had observed that the maiden—perhaps scarcely conscious of it—looked with evident partiality upon Paoli.

Steno rejoiced at this, for he felt satisfied that the Marchese, judging from some expressions that fell from his lips, would regard an attachment between the exile and his daughter as a desirable object. He admired and loved the young knight as a father : he had closely studied his disposition ; and a constant intercourse of several months satisfied him that his daughter's happiness would be secured by a union with the Corsican, provided they should become mutually attached.

A few days before the festivities were to take place at the Ducal Palace, the Corsican, whose whole heart was engaged in the fitting up of his galley for the expedition, returned early from the arsenal. The day was an unusually wet one : he was going, notwithstanding, to Chiozzi to make some inquiries for the Marchese, when, in passing the saloon on his way to his chamber, he heard the sweet tones of the Lady Paulina's voice, accompanied by the harp. Passionately fond of music, he forgot his object in seeking his chamber and entered the saloon. Both sisters were in the apartment—Julia embroidering, Paulina playing and singing.

"This is quite an unusual visit, Signor Paoli," said the Lady Paulina, pausing and looking into the face of the Corsican with a bright smile. "Has the Lion" (the name of the galley) "been outrageous and driven you away ? for I know even this day of torrents, bad as it is, would not have that effect."

"Fair Paulina," returned the knight, seating himself beside the maiden, "the charm of your voice arrested my steps. I was going to Chiozzi."

"Going to Chiozzi such a day as this ?" laughed the maiden. "It was well for your gondoliers that my voice had the power of detaining you. *They* will thank me at all events ; for I suppose you will wisely remain where you are."

"Undoubtedly, if you will continue the ballad you were singing when I came in. I can go to Chiozzi any day ; but your sweet voice is too—"

"Now, Signor Paoli, I wont hear any flattery from you. I will take all you were going to say for truth," interrupted the maiden, playfully.

"Since when, Paulina, have you taken a dislike to flattery—

always acceptable to our sex ?" interrogated Julia, looking up from her work.

" Nay, Julia," responded Paulina, " not to *all* our sex. You, for one, cannot bear it, and would, I verily believe, send Steno into exile were he only to hint at paying you a compliment."

" I wish Michaello would flatter more and use his wit less," returned Julia, thoughtfully. " But let the Signor Paoli have the ballad. I wish for the rest of it myself, having never heard you sing it before."

" I don't think in conscience I ought to go on," said Paulina, running her fingers over the harp. " I do verily believe it was the rain that drove you in here, Signor Paoli, for shelter. I cannot think what you men can be doing day after day on board that galley."

" Sing me the song first, Paulina, and you shall know all about it," returned the Corsican.

" Well, well, you men must be obeyed: so, in revenge, I will inflict upon you the whole thirteen verses of this most doleful ballad."

Paulina's voicee that touched the heart; and the ballad was a sweet, plaintive melody.

The Corsican listened with rapt attention, gazing on the speaking features of the singer. The singular likeness of Paulina to the unknown Agnes more forcibly than ever struck him.

" It certainly is a very singular likeness," unconsciously uttered the knight as Paulina ceased.

But recollecting himself, he paid the lovely Venetian the compliments she so well merited for the song.

" Now that you have done complimenting me, Signor Paoli," said the maiden, inquiringly, and looking in his face, " what did you mean by saying—though I don't think you intended it for mortal ears—' It is certainly a most singular likeness ?' You were looking at me at the time—so I must know who it is I am like. Some fair Corsican maiden, of course."

" In truth, beautiful Paulina, I likened you to no Corsican damsel. We cannot boast of one so fair within the limits of our little isle."

" Taking that for granted, Sir Knight," returned the maiden, a little impatiently, " who do I resemble ? Any one in Venice ? "

" In sooth, Paulina," returned Giaeinto, with a smile, " I know not where the damsel may be at this moment. The only name I heard her addressed by was Agnes—she was very beautiful, very young, and very interesting."

" Agnes !" repeated the Lady Julia, laying down her work;

"we have a very fair cousin of that name. But there are many so called."

"Where did you meet that distressed damsel?" inquired Paulina; "for, of course, you delivered her from some imminent peril, like a true wandering knight; for, somehow, you adventurous cavaleros are always lucky in finding peerless maidens to rescue."

"You are not far wrong, fair lady," replied Paoli, laughing, "for, in truth, the maiden was in danger, and I had the good fortune to save her from it, for which service I received a very bright smile from the damsel, and the thanks of a stout-hearted old cavalero—whose name, if I remember, right, was Tolosino."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed both sisters at once, looking astonished in the face of the equally surprised Corsican; "it was our cousin, Agnes Alviano, after all. How strange! But let us hear the whole adventure, from beginning to end," anxiously demanded Paulina, with a slight variation of colour.

This request Giacinto obeyed, being equally anxious to hear more of his hitherto fair unknown.

The Corsican's account was a very modest one. This Paulina guessed, and resolved to get a fuller narrative from Pulini, who was a most especial favourite in the Marchese's family.

Giacinto did not even touch upon his interview or combat with Duke Guarnieri, merely saying he had rescued the young lady from falling into the hands of some German Condottieri.

"And now may I ask you," questioned the knight, "where this fair cousin of yours is residing, and who is the Cavalero Tolosino and his good dame?"

Paulina did not reply; she was somewhat abstracted. But the Lady Julia said, "You have fairly, Sir Knight, earned our gratitude. Our family are destined to be indebted to yours. Agnes, is, in sooth, more our sister in affection than cousin—we three were reared together."

"And a sweeter being in temper and disposition never existed," rejoined the generous Paulina, looking up. From that moment she formed an internal resolution that saved her from much unhappiness.

"Agnes," continued the Lady Julia, "is the only daughter of the Signor Alviano, a wealthy merchant, who married our mother's sister, and who has been settled in the city of Byzantium nearly eighteen years. My aunt unfortunately died when Agnes was only two years old; and the little girl was

sent with its nurse to be reared and educated in Venice under our mother's eye. She was brought up with us, and is about two years younger than Paulina. Her father wishing her return when not quite sixteen, she left us, to our deep regret, under the care of the Signor Tolosino, a stout old cavalero, and a distant relation of our family, who resides in a fine old castle near Livorno. My father thought it safer that Agnes should embark for Byzantium in a Florentine galley—as we are at war with Genoa, and the Adriatic was at that time covered with Genoese galleys. She is by this time, I trust, safe and happy in her father's arms. How strange, Signor Paoli, that you should be her deliverer from such peril!"

"Positively, Signor Paoli," observed Paulina with a quiet smile, "you ought, from the very romance of your adventure, to be in love with my beautiful and fascinating cousin—for fascinating she is ; and, although so very young, I assure you she turned the brains of half our Venetian cavaleros."

As the maiden paused, Paoli looked inquiringly in her expressive face, and said, "But what ought I to do, fair Paulina ? you did not finish your sentence."

The maiden blushed slightly, replying, "Oh, you know very well what you ought to do. You, a knight, a sworn protector of our sex ! Why, you ought by this time to have ridden half Italy over in search of your ladye love."

The Corsican smiled, saying, "But love is not always the growth of an hour. If beauty had such potent influence, what should, or would, our sex do ?"

"Do !" somewhat sadly echoed the maiden, "why, you would love and adore each pretty face you saw, till a fairer came in the way, and then the first would be forgotten."

"Nay, Paulina," interrupted Julia, "you are severe. You must not judge all for the peccadilloes of a few."

"By-the-bye, Signor Paoli," interposed Paulina, wishing to change the subject, "I wanted to ask you a question. You are a Knight of San Stefano. Are the rules of the order the same as those of Rhodes ?"

"Nearly the same ; but I am only a lay Knight of St. Stephen—not a brother of the order. I am neither bound by vow nor subject to rules or regulations."

Paoli had scarcely ceased speaking when Count Steno entered the room. A pleased smile passed over the Venetian's features when he beheld Paoli seated beside the fair Paulina. After saluting his betrothed, and whispering some lover's hope in her ear, he turned to the Corsican, saying, in a bantering tone,—

"So here you are, enjoying the smiles of beauty, while I have been toiling all day, *pro bono publico*. I thought you

were gone to Chiozzi ; but, *cospetto !* I see you are a wiser and a better employed man."

"The Signor Paoli," said Paulina, thoughtfully, "would, I fervently believe, rather hear the clangor of steel against steel, than the clatter of female tongues. He would prefer a battlefield to crowded saloons."

"Do not imagine any such thing, Paulina," said Count Steno, laughing. "I consider him a very ardent admirer of your most adorable sex, and very likely to fall most desperately in love. When he *does* get into that scrape—and if I am not mistaken," added the Venetian, whispering in the maiden's ear, "he is in a fair way—eh, Paulina, how beats your own little heart?"

"Quite as regular as yours, Michaello," returned the maiden in a low voice, and at the same time rising. "And, take my advice," she added, "do not meddle with other hearts than your own."

Some few days after this period of our story Count Steno entered the chamber of Paoli before his morning toilet was completed.

"What on earth, Michaello," questioned the Corsican, "has made you stir thus early from your mansion ? You look serious. Has anything unusual happened to you ?"

"In truth, Giacinto, I must make you my confidant in a very silly transaction—to say the least of it. I wish to keep the affair from reaching Julia's ears. You know she is of a serious turn of mind, and always warning me that my ill-starred taste for satire will, if indulged, bring me into a scrape."

"And the noble maiden is right, Michaello," returned Paoli, apprehensively.

"Why, I confess," returned Steno, "what I have done would be better had it never been done, trifling as it is. I am now rather angry with myself for letting my temper get the better of my reason. Besides, the Doge's age——"

"Why, surely, Steno," interrupted the Corsican, with a start of surprise, "you have not been mad enough to exercise your wit upon the person of your ruler ?"

"*Per Bacco !*" returned the Count, somewhat scornfully, "even so, *amico mio*. However, listen, my friend, to the whole affair as it occurred, and then judge me guilty, or not guilty. But one thing is certain—I must try and keep the tale from reaching Julia's ears, and in doing that I count upon your assistance.

"You must know, then, Paoli, that the night before last I was invited to a small and select supper party at the Ducal Palace. It was, in sooth, a very pleasant meeting, and for two or three hours the Doge was in the very best humour.

Witty and agreeable he can be ; but there is no trusting his temper.

“ You have met at several of our *fêtes* the lively and satirical Bianca Spolino, and you have often assisted her in her mad-cap sallies, as you called them. In fact, Bianca is the prettiest mad-cap in Venice ; but wherever she is, mischief is sure to come from her laughing eyes.

“ The night wore on, and, after supper, I was standing chatting with Bianca, when the young Duchessa, passing by, whispered something in Bianca’s ear, which caused the maiden to laugh. In fact, she laughed so loud that the Duchessa held up her finger playfully, and, turning to me, was on the point of saying something, when the Doge suddenly walked in between us, as if to separate us. His face, to my extreme surprise, was purple with rage. He turned full upon me, looking me fiercely, and almost savagely, in the face, and saying at the same time in a low, but very distinct, voice—‘ Count Steno, I insist on your quitting the palace this instant. Beware, signor ! I have watched you. Age has not made me blind to my own dis-honour. Begone, sir ! I will have no reply.’

“ My blood flew to my temples at this most uncalled-for insult. I would have replied, but I saw that Bianca was deadly pale, and the Duchessa, leaning on her arm, seemingly greatly shocked. Curbing my indignation, I returned the frown of the proud, imperious, and jealous old man ; and, turning on my heel, I left the saloon. As I passed through the council-chamber—I know not what devil put it in my head—but, taking out my pencil, I wrote upon the ducal throne a pasquinade,* and left the palace. Now I could almost chop the hand off that did it—I meant only to satirize the Doge ; yet the words are capable of a double meaning, and might throw a slur upon the innocent Duchessa.”

“ I am sorry, very sorry to hear that,” interrupted the Corsican, thoughtfully. “ You surely—”

“ Nay, Giacinto, you wrong me,” interrupted Steno. “ I will peril life at any moment with any one who says, or imagines, I meant purposely to wound the feelings of Faliero’s bride. No, no. There’s the curse of satirical scribbling. From this hour I forswear it.

“ But to conclude the farce—for such it is now likely to be. The Doge read the lines, and was furious, and vowed vengeance against the writer. He suspected me. I was summoned, and did not think of denying it. No apology could soften the rancour of his heart towards me. The affair was laid before the

* Historical.

Council of Forty, of which I am a member. The Doge wished the Council to look upon the affair as he did, and to consider it a deadly and offensive act—and a State crime. This was folly. I knew before the Doge could, the sentence that would be pronounced upon me, namely, confinement to my own palace for a few days.

“Now, this affair is known only to the few; for everything that passes within the precincts of St. Mark remains a profound secret. Julia is not very likely to hear of it; but my confining myself to my palace for eight or ten days will look odd. So suppose you take a trip with me to my paternal castle at Garda. You can say so at breakfast. Julia knows I intend going there in a day or so, to see about some improvements, as I intend passing the first month of our marriage there.”

“But is that undergoing your sentence, Steno?” inquired Giacinto, somewhat surprised.

“*Tut, amico mio!*” returned the Count, with a laugh. “The sentence was a mere matter of form, to please the jealous old man. I must not be seen in Venice, and nothing more is required. So now do you go down to breakfast, and join me at Fusina. I will have horses there ready for us. Adieu! Of course, you need not say you saw me this morning, unless you are asked, which is not likely, as I am not in general given to early rising.”

During breakfast, Giacinto casually observed that he was going to accompany Count Steno to Garda.

Julia looked up, fixing her eyes on our hero with a very meaning glance.

“Why, what a changeable being Michaello is!” exclaimed the Marchesa, laughing. “He promised a week ago to take us this very day to Gino. It is to be hoped, Julia,” added the fond mother, patting her daughter’s cheek, “that by-and-bye you will keep this volatile Count in better order.”

“I want you, Giacinto,” said the Marchese, rising, “to accompany me for half an hour to the arsenal. Juliano will attend you afterwards to Fusina. Pisani’s new galley, the Colossus, will be launched this morning; she is of the same build and capabilities as the Lion, with a very trifling improvement of my own, in the fashion of her bow. Don’t hurry,” added the Marchese, leaving the room, “I have an order to write.”

Paulina, as she followed her father, said to Paoli, who appeared very intent upon a cup of chocolate,—

“So you are going to Garda. Do just tell Michaello that if I were Julia he should not get off so lightly. He should pay a penalty for his broken promises which he would little like.”

"What penalty should that be, fair maiden?" asked the Corsican, smiling. "I should like to know, as a warning to avoid striking on the same rock."

"There is no fear of you, Sir Knight," replied Paulina, thoughtfully, and with a slight change of colour. "Your barque is too well freighted with liberty and glory to afford room for love's peccadilloes. *Adieu!* I wish you a pleasant trip."

Paoli was now alone with the Lady Julia. He, too, was rising, when the soft low voice of the maiden arrested his steps.

"I entreat you will excuse my delaying you, Signor Paoli," began the Lady Julia. There was some slight hesitation in her manner, as she added, "I thought I heard the tones of Count Steno's voice in the corridor this morning, speaking to your attendant, Pulini. Was such the case, Signor Paoli?"

"Michaello was with me early this morning!" returned the knight, "to arrange this excursion to Garda."

"Very singular he did not stay to breakfast!" remarked the maiden, her mild and expressive eyes resting upon his with a somewhat searching expression. "Was there any particular reason that he should be so long at Fusina before you?"

"Very probably, signora, public business requires his presence till the very minute of departure."

"Ah! Signor Paoli," returned the Lady Julia, with a very pensive smile, "is the air of Venice affecting you already with its mysterious properties?"

Giacinto looked a little conscious: he was, by nature, a bad deceiver: his features, like his heart and mind, were open and easily read.

"I wish you, Signor Paoli," pursued Julia, "to tell Michaello—he will mind you, for he esteems you much—that even the walls of St. Mark cannot at all times keep the secrets of its inmates, or confine a lady's tongue—or frighten it into silence. I am a party in Steno's secret. Tell him that I hope the events of the night before last will be a lesson to him, and cause him to forbear a dangerous desire of exercising a talent that, nine cases out of ten, may cause much mischief, and can seldom, if ever, tend to good. I am not offended with Michaello, for he has a noble, honourable heart—he is a little thoughtless and giddy, and gets sometimes into scrapes. This last is truly serious, for it might, in Venice, cost a life, even to a member of the Council of Forty. And now *adieu, signor!* But do not think I deal in mysteries. I gained my knowledge from the Duchessa's lady in waiting, Bianca Spolino, who informed me of the rude, if not insulting, treatment Steno received from the

Doge. Still, I cannot excuse the thoughtless slur thrown on the innocent Duchessa."

Giacinto eagerly explained to Julia how deeply Steno felt for having done so.

"But how has Steno avoided the anger of the Doge?" inquired the maiden, anxiously. "Bianca did not tell me *that*."

"He was sentenced, by the Council of Forty, to a few days' confinement in his own palace."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Julia, "and he is now going to exasperate the Doge—for hear of it he will—by despising the sentence passed upon him."

"Signor Paoli," exclaimed the voice of the Marchese from without, "I am now ready."

"One word more," said Julfa, anxiously. "Tell Steno—and add *your* entreaties to *mine*—tell him it will make me happy if he would submit literally to the sentence. You promise me?"

"Most willingly, signora, for your opinion coincides with mine."

The Corsican joined the Marchese, passed an hour in the arsenal, and then crossed the lagune to Fusina.

Steno readily listened to Paoli's reasoning, added to Julia's wish; and, like a very obedient lover, returned to Venice, and shut himself up in his palace. But there being no hindrance to his enjoying himself therein, he took especial care to assemble his friends around his hospitable board, with whose assistance, and the composition of a volume of love-sonnets, dedicated to the Lady Julia, he got through the week tolerably to his satisfaction. The time being expired, he hastened to throw himself at the feet of his mistress, determined to think no more of the affair, and believing it was equally banished from the Doge's mind.

But Count Steno was unfortunately mistaken. Trivial as was the case, it brought much sorrow and persecution on many.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VENETIAN BRAVO.

"Your old enemies, Giacinto," remarked the Marchese, one morning, at breakfast, "are determined to have more than one iron in the fire—to use an old saying."

"How so, Marchese?" questioned the Corsican, anxiously. "I should not be sorry to hear that Genoa has got an iron too much in the fire, and that she even burned her fingers."

"It is not unlikely but she may in the end," returned the Marchese. "The Genoese have instigated Louis of Hungary to declare war against our republic. He has demanded the province of Dalmatia as his right."

"And of course Venice has refused his claim?" said our hero.

"That I cannot take upon me to say, Giacinto. Louis is a prince of active courage and superior talents; and, though somewhat inconstant of purpose, is of a noble and generous temper. I fear a war with Louis would not benefit Venice. Nevertheless, our rulers are prepared; and you will be surprised to hear they have resolved to take into pay your quondam antagonist, the famous Duke Guarnieri, who is encamped with five thousand men on the borders of the Trevesan Marsh—having routed the forces of the Lord of Padua, who attempted to arrest his march."

"He is a dangerous neighbour, in peace or at war," said our hero. "I should think Louis of Hungary will, if they come to blows, find him a formidable antagonist. Did you hear how Sir John Hawkwood has disposed of himself and his gallant band? He has been watching the movements of the Barbuti for some time."

"Report says," replied the Marchese, "that Guarnieri had designs against Florence; but that Sir John Hawkwood, breaking up his encampment, entered that city by the express desire of the Florentines, and Guarnieri, if he had any project against the republic, abandoned it, broke up his camp, and suddenly marched into the Paduan territory. If he enters into the service of Venice, it will lighten the coffers of St. Mark to pay him and his band. Still it would never do to let him become a confederate of Louis of Hungary. You may depend upon it he knew what he was about when he encamped on the borders of the Trevesan Marsh. By-the-bye, you are going with the girls to Gino, so I must take charge of the Lion to-day. That pilot from Chiozzi has not returned yet; I hope he may before you sail. He's a valuable fellow."

That same evening Giacinto, somewhat heated after his excursion to Gino—the day having been uncommonly sultry—entered a gondola, in order to enjoy the cool air that played along the surface of the grand canal. Pulini, as usual, accompanied him. The knight loved to talk of the past, and of those that were gone.

The moon was at full, and threw a flood of silvery light over the proud buildings of Venice on one side, contrasting strongly with the deep shadows of those on the opposite side of the canal. Numbers of sombre-looking gondolas, freighted

with the gay and light-hearted, swept by. Instrumental music, singing, and joyous laughter, came from beneath the dark awnings of the boats.

It was *Tempo di Carnivale*. As Giacinto glided along, he could see within the chambers of the palaces on each side, brilliantly lighted, and thronged with crowds of gay maskers ; even the long balconies were crowded, and the laugh, the jest, and the soft silvery tones of the Venetian dames, fell clear and distinct upon the ear.

“ Land me at St. Mark’s stairs. I will have an hour’s stroll amid yon motley groups,” said the knight to his gondolier.

The piazzas of St. Mark were, in truth, thronged to excess. Nobles and contadini, harlequins and mountebanks, under the privilege of the ample mantle and mask, were in happy forgetfulness of everything save the enjoyment of the hour.

To Paoli the mask answered no purpose : he relished neither the custom nor the inconvenience ; and for half an hour he rambled amid the noisy crowd, highly amused ; till at length, getting tired of the din and confusion of tongues, he rambled into a deserted piazza, and, leaning against a pillar, kept his eyes fixed upon the crowd in the distance. But his thoughts rambled elsewhere : though within sight, and almost within sound of the gay maskers, the spot where he stood seemed as silent and deserted as if miles from the scene of gaiety.

Not very far from where the Corsican was standing, wrapt in thought, and nearly concealed in the deep shadow of the arcade, appeared, also reclining against a column, a very remarkable figure. His height equalled that of the Corsican ; his arms were folded across a broad chest ; his figure, judged through the folds of a brown mantle, was muscular ; his head was covered with the heavy slouched Venetian beaver, which threw a deep shade over his features ; the position of the head, bent down upon the chest as if in repose, completely concealed the face, which was unmasked.

So profound seemed the repose, or listlessness, of this stranger, that he did not observe the approach of a male figure, enveloped in a pale blue mantle, his features being concealed by a silk mask.

This person stepped up close to the motionless figure leaning against the pillar ; and, laying his hand on his shoulder, said, in a low but distinct voice,—

“ Asleep, Paulo Verbano ! Are the purlieus of St. Mark so desirable a resting-place, or so very secure, as to tempt you to repose ? ”

“ And why not, pray ? ” demanded the stranger, raising his head, but remaining in the same listless attitude. “ The place

is quite secure enough for me when it pleases me to seek repose. Who are you ? And what brings you to seek Paulo Verbano ? ”

“ You seem testy, good Signor Verbano,” returned the Blue Mantle, in a sneering tone. “ You might guess I required a trifle at your hands, and not be as testy as if you had got a young wife to tease you.”

“ Has not Paulo Verbano a right to a young bride as well as our noble Doge ? At all events,” he muttered, in a lower tone, “ his Highness will never have what I have had.”

“ And what’s that, Paulo ? ” returned Blue Mantle.

“ Five hungry children to feed,” replied the bravo, with a fierce laugh ; “ but I ask you again, what have I to do for you ? I don’t know even the tone of your voice.”

“ My purse is heavy,” replied Blue Mantle. “ Consequently it is no matter whether you know, or do not know, the tone of my voice. I was recommended to Paulo Verbano as the only bravo in Venice who had a conscience.”

“ Conscience ! humph ! You want a cheap job, I suppose,” muttered the bravo.

The Blue Mantle laughed, saying,—

“ Do you know the Marchese Tiepolo ? ”

At that name the bravo started from his careless posture, and laid his large, bony hand forcibly on the other’s shoulder.

“ Do I know the only noble in Venice that has a heart ? Who are you ? you dare not come to Paulo Verbano, if you valued your life, with a proposal to harm a hair of Tiepolo’s head. Speak, man, speak ! ”

“ Take your grip from my arm, man ! ” exclaimed Blue Mantle, roughly, and with a violent jerk ; for, though short, he was strongly built.

Having freed himself, he added, in a quieter tone,—

“ Why, what a fiend’s humour you are in to-night ! You mistake my words. I want not to harm your worthy friend, the Marchese Tiepolo.”

“ Well then, *amico*, ” returned the bravo, “ to the point at once. What am I to do ? and what is to be my reward ? ”

“ Take that as earnest,” replied the stranger, tossing a purse into the hands of the bravo. “ Another, better filled, when the job is done.”

“ Humph ! ” muttered Verbano, chinking the gold in the purse. “ That’s coming to the point. Who’s the man ? ”

“ I asked you a moment ago, if you knew the Marchese Tiepolo. In his palace dwells the individual I wish removed. He is not a native of Venice. I do not—— ”

“ *Basta, Basta !* ” interrupted the bravo, breaking into a low,

chuckling laugh, that startled the stranger. "Oh, by the mass, it's droll!"

"Why, what's in the wind now, Paulo? It may be droll to you, who pocket the gold; but, by St. Anthony, your victim will see nothing droll in being tickled by the point of your stiletto! Do you know the man I mean? a tall—"

Laying his heavy hand upon the shoulder of him in the blue mantle, the bravo turned him round, and, pointing with his finger in the direction of our hero, who stood out boldly and fully revealed in the strong moonlight, he said,—"Is yonder stranger like your man?"

The unknown started back a pace or two, exclaiming, in a fierce, though low voice,—

"'Tis he, by St. Anthony! I will strike him now. No better time or place."

But Paulo's hand checked the stranger's movement, and he said,—

"Put up your dagger, man, and use your eyesight better. Why, it's only yesterday that I received two purses to remove that same individual—*Corpo di Bacco!* If he stays here much longer, he will win the hearts of half the women in Venice, and the hatred of all the men. He'll make my fortune."

"I do not understand you, Paulo," returned the stranger sulkily. "You say you are paid to stab that individual, yonder; and yet there he stands, within fifty yards of you—his back to a pillar, and his eyes and his thoughts on the moon. Where could you strike a better blow, and with greater security?"

"Humph! so you think. Look again. Do you see, not five paces to the right of our victim, a stout, broad-backed man, in the garb of a squire, leaning on the hilt of an iron basket-hilted sword, with his eyes steadily fixed upon the figure of his master? Do you think you could cross that long stream of light that intervenes between us, without attracting that man's observation? Why, that fellow follows his master like a shadow. He has had some warning of the good intentions of our Venetian cavaleros. Or do you think it nothing to strike a man built after the fashion of that Corsican (for such he is), and stand, besides, a tussle with his squire, who could afford to lose a head, and yet stand some inches taller than such as you? Be satisfied that I shall choose my time and place, and that the job shall be done to your satisfaction. So *adio*, Signor Blue Mantle! I have a trifling affair in hand. Remember the other purse, I pray you, when the job is done."

And the bravo laughed his chuckling laugh, and, plunging into the deep shades of the piazza, suddenly disappeared.

At that moment the Corsican moved from his resting-place, totally unconscious of the very interesting conversation carried on within so short a distance from him.

The stranger in the blue mantle looked after the Corsican's receding figure for a moment, and muttering to himself,—

“Curse that bravo! I do believe the villain is afraid to strike the blow. Better trust to my own dagger, which never yet failed me.”

And, gathering his mantle about him, he rapidly left the spot.

Scarcely had he retired when the head of a boy was protruded from behind a pillar close by, watching the figure in the blue mantle till it disappeared. The owner of the head then stepped forth, and looked carefully along and without the piazza. He was a youth of about fifteen years of age, vested in the garments of a page. He held a mask in one hand, and a short, dark mantle in the other. Finding the coast clear, he threw the mantle over his shoulders, tied on the mask, and then, with a light, active step, he also hurried on through the piazza of St. Mark.

In a few minutes he became mingled in the noisy and bustling crowd.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MASKED BALL!

TIME passed, and the long-expected night of the masked ball at the Ducal Palace at length arrived. The fleet was expected to be in readiness to sail for Byzantium a few days after. The good people of Venice had, therefore, three topics of conversation, namely—the ball, the expedition to the Levant, and the expected war with the King of Hungary.

Two of those topics in no way interested our hero. He cared very little, if at all, about the war with Louis, and not much more about the festivities of St. Mark. Three months previously he had had an opportunity of sending letters to his old friend and cousin, Otho Sampiero, in Rome, relating, in a brief manner, his adventures, his present situation, and his intention of proceeding to the Levant—having a noble galley under his command—and inviting Otho, and any other young Corsican noble inclined, to join him in the expedition against Genoa. To this letter he had received no reply, and he felt uneasy about the fate of a cousin to whom he was strongly

attached. In those days of no posts, intelligence from places far apart was only to be obtained by private messengers, or couriers. Travelling was exceedingly dangerous and difficult, whether by sea or land. The Mediterranean and the Adriatic swarmed with pirates and corsairs, while the land was overrun with robbers and Condottieri—a species of robber of the worst kind ; for they levied contributions under an act of parliament then much in fashion—brute force. Giacinto Paoli, therefore, considered his friend might have met with some misfortune in travelling to join him. He had perhaps fallen into the power of the Genoese, which would lead, perchance, to imprisonment for life.

These thoughts, and some others that would intrude themselves on his mind, found the Corsican knight somewhat out of spirits the night of the masked ball.

“ Well, Signor Paoli,” said the Lady Paulina, “ what is to be your character to-night ? You have not told us what dress you have selected. That mad-cap Steno is going as Folly—with cap and bells ; and Julia is positively displeased ; so he has consented to change his costume—after an hour’s sport, as he says.”

“ A simple domino, Paulina,” answered the knight, “ will do to disguise my figure ; and that is all I wish, as I prefer being amused to the trouble of amusing. You and the Lady Julia have, I see, selected the simple but graceful habits of the Dalmatian maidens.”

“ Here comes our dear father, as Soliman the Magnificent,” said Paulina ; “ and magnificent he truly looks. And see, here is Julia, for once captivated with Folly.”

Count Steno entered the room, leading his betrothed.

Covering themselves with ample mantles, the whole party proceeded to the bank of the canal, and entered the handsome and beautifully decorated gondola of the Marchese. They were soon mingled amid the countless numbers gliding along the still waters of the Grand Canal. The ladies were delighted with the gay and brilliant scene ; for the palaces on each side were splendidly illuminated. Even our hero’s spirits revived under the influence of the hour, and the spell that youth and beauty cast around the heart of man—when the softer sex reign triumphant. The noble arch of the Rialto, over which blazed the arms of the republic, in every coloured lamp, elicited the admiration of all, as they shot beneath its curve.

But the principal attraction was the Ducal Palace and the Piazza of St. Mark. Every pillar was wreathed with alternate circles of flowers and lamps ; while the square itself, lighted

by innumerable torches, appeared one dense mass of human heads.

The nobility, being provided with private tickets of invitation, were allowed ingress to the palace through private portals ; and through these the Marchese and his party entered, and proceeded to ascend the celebrated staircase of the palace, called the Giant's Stairs.

Hundreds of masks covered this noble and ample ascent ; inhabitants of every clime then known appeared strangely mingled, but all seeking one object—pleasure. Ushers, with long white rods, stood at the top to show those provided with private cards into a more select portion of the Ducal Palace, where the Doge and Dogeressa would appear.

Count Steno, with the Lady Julia, led the way up the Giant's Stairs. The Marchese and Marchesa followed, and our hero and the beautiful Paulina came next—the latter full of life and spirits, happy to be leaning on the arm of one who, in spite of all her efforts, was dear to her young and guileless heart.

Naturally of a gay and cheerful spirit, the Corsican rapidly caught the infection of his fair companion's spirit, and, becoming unusually gay, entered into the folly of the hour with animation.

They had nearly gained the summit of the stairs, and Giacinto was bending his head to catch a sentence from the lips of Paulina—for the noise around was great—when a voice close to his ear whispered,—

“ You are watched ! keep on your mask ! ”

Surprised, he turned quickly round ; but, in the motley group, eagerly striving to gain the summit, it would have been folly to fix on any individual as the person who had uttered the warning.

“ Who are you seeking, Signor Paoli ? ” demanded Paulina. “ Our party have reached the top. We shall soon get rid of this promiscuous crowd.”

“ Some masquerade trick, I suppose,” returned our hero, who carried his mask in his hand. “ I thought some one whispered in my ear.”

“ Oh, you are new to these, our Venetian revels, Sir Knight,” observed Paulina, laughingly. “ You will find that many will whisper in your ear ; but you must let the words find their way out at the other.”

On gaining the summit, the Marchese and his party were ushered into a range of splendidly decorated and brilliantly lighted saloons, already filled with the high nobility of Venice.

“ Well, fair maiden,” exclaimed Count Steno to Paulina,

shaking his bells,—for he still resolved to have an hour's frolic as Folly,—“would it please you, before you plunge into the vortex of pleasure, that I read you a homily on the dangers that surround you ?”

“Away !” exclaimed the maiden, with a laugh.

“Folly, away with your cap and bells,
Pleasure now the hour rules
Still thy silly tinkling tells,
Now all men here are fools.”

“By Jove, I have hopes of you now, Paulina : I never knew you rhyme before. I see it's no use for Folly to talk sense, so I'll away. Take care of yourself, Giacinto. Hide that handsome face of thine, or you will have all the women making love to you.”

Our hero did as he was bidden. He put on the mask, much as he disliked it ; and Paulina proposed a stroll through the saloons before joining the dancers. “I wish,” said she, “to show you our Doge and Dogeressa, and many of our nobility who will, with his Highness, stand unmasked.”

Accordingly, passing through several saloons, they came to one, at the upper end of which was a slightly raised platform covered with crimson cloth, whereon were placed two richly carved chairs. Standing on this platform were the Doge and Dogeressa, and about a score of the nobility of Venice unmasked. These nobles, though they carried a mask in their hands, wore no fancy dress of any sort, but were attired in the costly and rich dress of the times. A very few years after, a law was passed by the rulers of Venice regulating the dress of the Venetian, and forcing the wealthiest noble to wear a cloak of Paduan manufacture, precisely the same as the meanest artizan.

At the period of which we write, the nobles dressed as they pleased. Their attire was generally composed of rich flowered silk, edged with costly lace, and their doublets were of gold and silver brocade.

“And now what think you of our Doge and his consort ?” questioned Paulina, as they approached close to the platform.

Giacinto looked long and fixedly on the remarkable lineaments of the unfortunate Marino Faliero. An agitated expression was upon his features. His dark grey eye was keen and penetrating, though he had reached seventy-six years of age. His glance remained not for a minute fixed : it roamed over the vast saloon as if in search of some wished-for object, and he appeared to give but little attention to the conversation of the nobles around him.

“If I were to judge from the human countenance,” said the

Corsican to Paulina, "I should say your sovereign, with all his power, is not a happy man."

"And yet you may read his countenance wrongly, Signor Paoli. But the Dogeressa ?"

"She is beautiful, in truth, and apparently full of spirits and vivacity. Who is that tall and handsome noble with whom she is conversing ?"

"That is the Doge's nephew, Bertuccio Faliero ; and that stern, fierce-looking man next him, with his arms folded, is the great admiral of the arsenal, Bertuccio Israello, who commands the Bucentaur, and is answerable for its safety with his life. There, next him, is the proudest noble in Venice," and, whispering, she added, "one of the Council of Ten, Giovanni Delfino. On the other side of the Dogeressa is the head of the noble house of Lioni. The rest are not conspicuous characters, so I pass them over. Now let us join the dancers."

The night, like every other night devoted to pleasure, drew rapidly to a close, when the Marchesa and her daughters expressed a wish to retire, as most of the nobility had already done so. Accordingly Giacinto, the Marchese, and Count Steno conducted the ladies to their gondola. The Marchese insisted on the young men staying longer ; but Paoli was not inclined to remain, till Steno whispered in his ear, "you *must* stay—I have something to communicate."

After the departure of the gondola, the young men returned to the still crowded saloons ; for though most of the nobility and their families, with the Doge and Dogeressa, had retired after supper, there still remained in the saloons great numbers of the wealthy citizens and the young signors of good families.

"And now, Michaello, what have you to say to recompense me for my loss of rest and pleasant dreams ?" asked Paoli.

"Pleasant dreams, no doubt, when you *do* dream, Giacinto," replied the Count, looking pleased—"with a fair maid of Dalmatia in the foreground of the picture. But listen to me. Though you did not know me in my change of dress, I was near you several times during the night ; and, singular enough, every time I cast my eyes upon you I saw, following you, a middle-sized, broad-shouldered man, attired as a palmer. I could not help noticing this figure ; for every time I saw *you*, I saw the palmer within a yard of you ; and, last of all, as you were passing from the stairs, through a crowded and somewhat dimly-lighted passage, to the canal, by Jove ! I observed the same palmer thrust himself through the crowd and endeavour to get near you. Now, Giacinto, in Venice it is not pleasant to have a substantial shadow dogging one beneath the piazzis of St. Mark. So I even stepped in between the palmer and you.

Balked in his object, whatever it was, he turned round and disappeared into the palace, amid the crowd. I must confess it, we Venetians are a jealous race ; and sometimes there is an awkward way of removing a favoured lover here in this city of the waves."

Giacinto recollected the warning he had received on entering the palace, and mentioned the circumstance to Steno.

"Then it's very clear, *amico mio*," returned Steno, "that you have a friend and a foe amid the motley group around us. Just stay where you are. I will go and change my dress. We will then have a turn through all the saloons. I will keep near you, and see if we cannot unmask this palmer."

After the departure of the Count, our hero fell into a train of thought far from pleasing. The observation made by Steno evidently showed that if he thought him attached to the beautiful Paulina, others might think the same. Inwardly he taxed his own heart : there all was confusion. The fair, youthful image of Agnes Alviano rose in imagination before him, and left him in doubt and perplexity. That he admired, nay, more than admired, the Marchese's daughter, he could not deny ; and had he never seen the young Agnes, there is scarcely a doubt but that his love would all have centred in Paulina.

So immersed in thought became the Corsican, that he forgot Count Steno, and the intention of his absence. Having taken off his mask to breathe a cooler air, Giacinto rambled from one saloon into another, without paying much heed to those about him.

He had walked into a narrow corridor thronged with masks, and was about to retrace his steps, when he suddenly received a violent push, and at the same moment a stiletto, aimed by a strong hand, pierced his mantle, and slightly grazed his side. Recovering himself, and turning rapidly round, pushing aside the crowd of masks—none of whom seemed aware of the attempted assassination—our hero obtained a glimpse of a man in a palmer's dress, answering to the description given him of that character by Count Steno.

The palmer was urging his way through the crowd, and our hero hastily followed. The palmer moved rapidly, and so bent was Paoli upon seizing his assailant that he followed him into a part of the Ducal Palace not appropriated to the festivities, and into which he had got by darting after the fugitive through a pair of folding-doors.

But the palmer had disappeared. Giacinto looked anxiously around. He found himself in a long colonnaded corridor, dimly lighted by a few half-expiring lamps, and which left the space under the colonnade in deep gloom.

"I have no business here," thought our hero, turning to look for the door through which he had entered. At that moment a person attired in black came forth, holding a lamp, followed by a figure enveloped in a mantle, whose extraordinary height at once riveted the attention of the Corsican, as he stood in the deep shade of a massive pillar. He was not observed by the strangers, who proceeded within a few yards of him.

As they passed, the tall stranger, whose head was covered by a slouched beaver, with a thick drooping plume, stopped, and, taking off his mask, placed it in his attendant's hand. With a start of astonishment, Paoli gazed upon the features now exposed. He could not be mistaken : the face was too deeply engraven upon his memory.

"Duke Guarneri!—and in the Palace of St. Mark!" inwardly ejaculated Giacinto.

Having received the mask and mantle, the attendant, or usher, pointed to a folding door directly opposite to where our hero stood, saying,—

"That is the door, signor—knock thrice. I will await your return in the blue chamber."

Guarnieri advanced to the door, while the usher retired.

Amazed at what he beheld, Giacinto did not move. His eyes, by a kind of fascination, followed the towering form of the German, whose magnificent figure appeared to singular advantage in the rich dress he wore.

The Duke knocked thrice at the folding-doors, which were covered with crimson cloth. Paoli's eyes were on the doors, when they fell back, and a blaze of light issued forth. The Duke entered, and the doors were immediately closed. Short as was the glance that our hero gained of the interior of the chamber, what he saw increased his amazement. He beheld a table covered with crimson cloth, round which stood many signors, richly habited and unmasked. One only of the group riveted the glance of the knight, and that one bore the attenuated features of Marino Faliero.

"I would rather not have seen all this," mentally exclaimed Paoli, as he slowly moved from his position. "I want not to dive into the secrets of St. Mark. 'Tis very strange ! But it concerns not me."

As he regained the door by which he had entered the corridor, two ushers in black, carrying lights, crossed his path, and stopped staring at him in great apparent surprise. One of them, in a cold, measured tone, said,—

"Signor, may I request to know your business in this part of the Ducal Palace ?"

"I have wandered hither," said Paoli, slightly hesitating,—

for at the moment he scarcely knew what to say. But, resolving to declare the simple fact, he added,—“I was stabbed by a person in the disguise of a palmer, and pursued him. I lost him here, and was not aware, till then, that I had wandered so far from the scene of festivity.”

The man looked keenly in the face of our hero as he spoke, and then whispered a moment with his companion. At length, turning to the knight, he said,—

“You will oblige me with your name and abode, signor.”

The man spoke in a much more civil and obliging tone when he had received our hero’s answer, which he wrote down on a small ivory tablet, and then requested the Corsican to follow them, as the guests had all quitted the Ducal Palace.

“We will show you an entrance into St. Mark’s-square by a private portal,” said the usher.

Having passed through several passages and chambers, they threw open a small, strong door, saying,—

“This will lead you into the square.” And, wishing him good night, they closed the door.

Giacinto Paoli stepped forward, and soon perceived he was in the piazza, and that the lights were fast expiring. Making the best of his way to the borders of the canal, he found Count Steno and his Squire Pulini pacing the quay, and anxiously examining the last stragglers as they took to their gondolas. The former looked amazingly surprised when he recognized him, saying,—

“In the name of St. Mark, Giacinto, where do you come from? I have been very uneasy since I missed you. You surely never left the palace by ____”

“The way we went in,” interrupted Paoli, laughing; “that I certainly did *not*. But let us to our gondola. By the Pope’s head, the sun is shining in the eastern sky! What shameful rakes we are!”

As they entered the gondola, Steno seriously repeated his question as to how he had quitted the Palace of St. Mark. “For,” added he, “I looked through every chamber for you.”

“Except the right one, Count,” returned Paoli; “for the palace assuredly contained me. I was excessively near getting a few inches of cold steel as a remembrance of this festivity.”

“Ha! say you so?” ejaculated Count Steno; “that accursed palmer, no doubt.”

“The very one, Steno; he led me a chase into a private part of the palace and then I lost him. But, meeting two ushers, they showed me out by a private portal.”

Our hero confined the recital of his adventure to these few simple words. He felt he had no right to pry into the secrets

of the Doge's Palace, and therefore remained silent concerning what he had seen.

Thus, that which he considered right, in the sequel nearly proved his destruction.

Steno made few remarks : he was surprised, and seemed thoughtful. And thus they parted to take a few hours' repose.

CHAPTER X.

THE ARREST.

NOTHING of material consequence occurred amongst the inmates of the Tiepolo Palace for some days after the events that had occurred at the ducal *fête*.

Paoli was occupied daily in seeing every preparation hastened on board the galley he was to command. Notwithstanding his constant occupations, his thoughts would at times revert to the events of that evening when Duke Guarneri had appeared before his astonished sight within the private galleries of the Palace of St. Mark. He was uneasy, for he felt satisfied that he had, by a singular coincidence, become possessed of a State secret—a dangerous possession, inasmuch as to preserve State secrets, human life, even in the highest grades, was a thing of nought with the stern tribunal that awed and ruled the Venetian people.

In a few days more, the whole Venetian fleet would be ready for sea. In fact, Giacinto—as little inclined to feel apprehension of danger as any mortal living—would very willingly have exchanged the gaieties of Venice for the stormy waters of the Adriatic.

There were moments when the events of the last few months intruded themselves painfully on his mind : his heart wavered strangely with respect to its feelings towards the Lady Paulina. His manner, notwithstanding every effort to the contrary, became embarrassed ; and the beautiful Venetian grew less cheerful and social. Before the arrival of the Corsican, Paulina Tiepolo was surrounded by a circle of passionate admirers. She felt no reluctance in dismissing her train of lovers ; for the maiden's heart was in truth untouched. That the Corsican, as time rolled on, was making a favourable impression on her, she did not deny in communing with her secret thoughts. But, fortunately for her own happiness, she was warned in time. Women are much quicker in reading the thoughts than men. She saw and felt, by the conduct and manner of Paoli, that a struggle was in his heart between a feeling of love for her and

a romantic passion for her cousin, Agnes Alviano. In the end, we have no doubt the feeling Paoli indulged for the maiden he had rescued would have given way to a pure and sincere love for the fair Paulina ; but an event occurred that separated their destinies for ever.

We do not hold up our hero as a model of human perfection —far from it. Impetuous and violent in disposition—wavering and somewhat fickle in his admiration of the softer sex, and unrelenting in his hatred of the oppressors of his country, the Corsican was, nevertheless, a faithful and firm friend, a true patriot, generous, unselfish, and of an unshrinking and untiring spirit during adversity and severe trials. These last, however, had softened, in a great measure, his fiery and impatient temper ; and his fickleness of heart was atoned for by a true and noble devotion to one who every way deserved it.

His galley was now fully equipped and manned. Several Corsican exiles had joined him ; for thousands of the natives, too stubborn to submit to the tyranny of their oppressors, fled the island, and sought service under the banner of any continental state, except those in league with Genoa.

The two pilots, so anxiously expected by the Marchese, had arrived, and had, at once, accepted service on board "The Lion."

Returning, one evening, from the galley, which was then lying in the lagune, with the rest of the fleet, in passing up the canal that led to the Tiepolo Palace, a youth, closely wrapped in a mantle and slouched beaver, approached the edge of the canal, and threw into the Corsican's gondola a paper folded round a stone.

Pulini picked it up, and, muttering, "Some fresh mischief, I suppose," handed it to his master, who beheld the action.

Unfolding the paper, Paoli perceived it was a letter directed to himself. Somewhat surprised, he read the following words :

"Quit the territories of the Venetian Republic before the next sun rises. You are denounced to the Council of Ten, as a traitor leagued with Genoa, and a spy in the secret pay of that Republic. To be suspected only, is death in Venice."

"This warning is from Carlo, the page, whose life you saved."

"This hint is not to be despised," thought Paoli, "notwithstanding the absurdity of the accusation." Then, addressing the gondolier, he said—"Turn back, Juliano. The Marchese is even now on board the galley of Pisano, with Count Steno. Better to meet a charge than wait till it meet you. Do you, Pulini, land at these steps. Proceed to the Tiepolo Palace, and just put our mails in readiness, should it be necessary to cross the lagunes this night."

“*Santa Madonna!* signor,” exclaimed Pulini, “what’s in the wind now?”

“Why, nothing very particular,” returned Paoli, with a smile at the rueful countenance of his squire. “Nevertheless, it may be necessary for our health to change the air of Venice for the more bracing climate on the other side of the lagunes.”

“Confound their masking and secret ways!” muttered the squire, as he leaped on shore. “I hear there is a spy of the State in every mansion in Venice; and that a man may go to bed comfortable, and yet be seen hanging, head downwards, between the red columns of St. Mark, the next morning.”

“I fear, signor,” said Juliano, in a low voice—as the gondola shot from the canal into the lagune—“I fear you have received evil tidings in that paper. An innocent man, signor, has no chance, if even suspected. Months will he lie buried in those accursed dungeons of St. Mark, even before he is examined as to his crime.”

“Something of that kind crosses my mind, Juliano,” returned the knight. “I am perfectly innocent and ignorant of having done ought to attract the notice of the rulers of Venice; but the name affixed to this paper assures me that I have little time to lose. That I have been accused by one who would stop at no falsehood to gratify his revenge, I feel satisfied.”

“Alas! signor, should you have, in truth, a bitter enemy in Venice—if the dagger fails, they have only to drop a line in the ‘Lion’s Mouth,’ and, innocent or guilty, the victim is sure to linger in horrid—*Jesu Maria!*” exclaimed the startled gondolier, as the oar fell from his hand, “we are lost!”

Casting off his jacket, to the astonishment of Paoli, Juliano dropped over the stern of the gondola, and, diving beneath the calm water, disappeared from the sight of our amazed hero. They were then just passing a small fleet of fishing-boats; it was getting dusk, and, scarcely had the gondolier disappeared, when a long black gondola, with its sable awning, and rowed by twelve oarsmen, all masked, shot alongside of Paoli’s bark. Immediately four men, vested in sable garments, closely masked and armed, leaped on board. The knight sprang to his feet, and his ready weapon flew from its sheath, as he stood ready to receive his enemies.

“Signor Paoli, this is madness. I arrest you as a prisoner of State,” uttered one of the figures who approached him. “To draw a weapon upon the officers of St. Mark, signor, is treason, without other charge; your sword, Sir Knight.”

Paoli for a moment was undecided. On terra firma he would not have hesitated, but, with his usual impetuosity and reck-

lessness, have stood upon the defensive, no matter what odds he should have to encounter.

"For what offence, signor, am I thus arrested?" demanded he.

"Treason, signor," calmly replied the officer.

"Treason!" echoed Paoli, bitterly. "On such a charge a Paoli never surrendered his good sword. Let it sleep in the waters of your sullen lagunes."

And the same instant he hurled the weapon through the opening of the awning. He heard the splash of the sword as it divided the still waters, and a fierce smile was on his lip as he turned towards the officer, saying,—

"I am ready to do your bidding."

"Where is your gondolier, signor?" suddenly demanded one of the strangers, after having carefully searched the boat.

"He was too wise, signor," replied Paoli, "or not polite enough, to wait your arrival."

The men whispered for a moment. Two of the masked boatmen entered Paoli's gondola, while the rest, followed by Paoli, went beneath the dismal awning of the state gondola. Handing the knight a large mantle and a mask, which allowed facilities for breathing, but not for seeing, he was requested to put them on. Without replying he did so, and, throwing himself upon a bench, remained buried in thought while the gondola pulled rapidly away.

One thing Paoli rejoiced at; and this was the probable escape of Juliano, who would, without doubt, inform Count Steno of his arrest. Had the gondolier been taken, his fate most likely would have been either banishment to some Venetian colony, or a dungeon for life. So fearful, indeed, and so terrible was the policy of the Venetian rulers at that period, and long after, that often in arresting a doomed victim those witnessing his arrest incurred the sure penalty of at least a long imprisonment. The fate of the ill-starred family of the Foscari will be an everlasting stain upon the page of Venetian history, which neither their glorious deeds nor proud conquests will ever efface.

As to the charge of treason, Paoli did not bestow upon it a thought. He felt the utter impossibility of such an imputation being maintained for a moment, when examined. What he dreaded was the long and dreary confinement he might, notwithstanding the efforts of his powerful friends, undergo before he would be brought before that mysterious tribunal at whose name even the proudest and haughtiest noble of Venice trembled. That Duke Guarneri had somehow discovered his residence in Venice was certain. To accuse him of any crime,

however monstrous and improbable, was easy enough. The open mouths of the two Lions standing at the head of the Giant's Stairs leading to the interior of St. Mark's Palace were daily the means through which a vindictive enemy might get rid of a foe, which no other scheme could remove.

Individuals frequently and mysteriously disappeared from society, and were no more heard of. Yet no man said, "In the dungeons of St. Mark, or beneath the leads of that fearful palace, the victim is to be found." No! The knowledge of their fate remained locked within the close recesses of their own hearts, and even the name of the wretched lost one perished.

Strange, that men thus bowed to a power of their own creation—that ten individuals should thus smite with impunity the thousands that surrounded them ; and that this secret and invisible sword should hang constantly over their heads—sleeping or waking—even in the very chambers of their palaces, uncertain that the most devoted of their domestics was not a paid hireling and spy of their tyrants !

The giddy and thoughtless Venetians nevertheless lived on, glorying in their country's glory—boasting of their wealth and wide-spread commerce—their days devoted to luxury—their nights to music, feasting, gambling, and intrigue. Bravos walking the purlieus of St. Mark—almost with impunity—always ready, for a well-filled purse, to rid any one of a rival ; while the sullen waters of their dark lagune offered a ready tomb for the victims of private vengeance or state executions.

Such was Venice during the middle ages ; and such it continued, with little variation, till the first half of the seventeenth century, when its glory and power began rapidly to decay. Finally the French Revolution swept it, and its secret tribunal, from the political face of the globe.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COUNCIL.

SEVERAL days had passed over the head of our hero in solitary confinement. His chamber was a vault beneath the Palace of St. Mark ; but it was not the terrible dungeon he had pictured to himself. The furniture, it is true, consisted of nothing more than a very old oak table and bench, and a tolerable bed ; nor was it very damp ; but the dim glare of a miserable oil lamp poorly compensated for the exclusion of heaven's light.

Once a day his jailer—a man cased in tight-fitting garments

of sable, always masked and always silent—visited him with food and fresh oil. Two others, similarly habited, paced day and night without the door ; so at least Paoli judged ; for he heard the hollow tread of their steps, though the sound of the human voice never reached his ear.

The Corsican was rapidly losing patience : he began to imagine his friends had forgotten him, or that their interest and power was as nothing with the terrible few that governed Venice.

“Surely,” thought the knight, as he paced the narrow limits of his chamber, “the mere accusation of a German free-booter could not, even with the tyrants of Venice, thus condemn a man to this cruel injustice.”

At length, at the expiration of the tenth day, four sable individuals entered his chamber, and one of them, handing him a mask, similar to that which had blindfolded him on his entrance to the vaults beneath San Marco, said, in a low voice,—

“ Remove not your mask till desired—I will conduct you, signor. Be silent.”

Rejoiced at seeing these symptoms of a change, Paoli obeyed with alacrity ; and after traversing innumerable passages, but without mounting or descending any steps, his guides stopped. Not a sound, save the reverberating echo of their own footsteps, disturbed the tomb-like silence of those dreary vaults. The very air—cold, damp, and noxious—struck a chill to the heart. But the unshrinking spirit of the Corsican repelled the approaches of fear, and when the man who had guided him said, in a low tone, “ Remove your mask,” he did so, with a rapid and impatient movement. There was nothing very remarkable or terrifying in what he beheld. He was standing alone (for his guides were gone) in the middle of a circular chamber, the walls of which were hung round with black cloth. From the roof was suspended a large lamp, casting a strong and steady light upon a large table, also covered by black cloth ; together with writing materials, a missal, and a crucifix of silver. At this table sat a man, with a half silk mask over the face ; and behind him, on a slightly raised platform, sat three signors, enveloped in sable mantles and completely masked.

For several moments there was a profound silence. Paoli stood calmly regarding the motionless figures of his three judges. His powerful and magnificent figure, on which the rays of the lamp fell, showed to peculiar advantage against the sable drapery of the chamber ; his face was somewhat paler, from his short confinement, but his dark and intelligent eyes were fixed upon his judges with as bright and piercing a gaze as ever.

“Signor Paoli,” said one of the masked judges, in a low, but not unpleasing voice, and drawing his chair in advance of the other two, “Signor Paoli, you stand before us charged with the crime of treason to the Government of Venice—of being in the secret service of Genoa—and of being leagued with others to overturn the existing Government of this State.”

It was with difficulty that the Corsican could restrain himself during the recital of his supposed crimes, so truly ridiculous did they seem to him.

“Such are the charges brought against you,” continued the mask, not heeding the impatient gesture of the Corsican.

“Now, signor, before you answer the questions that will be put to you, take that crucifix and swear by your Redeemer to answer with truth to those interrogations. Answer briefly, and with strict integrity; and, if innocent, you have nothing to fear.”

Paoli did as he was required, and then calmly waited the issue.

“By birth,” began the inquisitor, “you are a Corsican. As such you have passed yourself in society since your residence in Venice. From what motive did you quit your native land?”

“To save my head, signor, upon which the Genoese Government was pleased to set an exorbitant price.”

As Paoli spoke, the secretary at the table wrote down each question and answer.

“You were, or are, a proscribed man, then. Was it for rebellion against the Genoese Government that a price was set upon your head?”

“No, signor,” hastily replied the Corsican; and his voice—for he spoke indignantly—rang through the vaulted chamber. “If the galleys of Genoa invaded your lagunes, and your citizens took up arms to repel them, would you stigmatize the patriots with the name of rebels? No, signor, I was proscribed because the name of Paoli was the watch-word of freedom. As well might the wolf and the lamb form a social compact as a Paoli accede to any terms with the cruel oppressors of his native land. So much, signors, for your charge of being in the pay of Genoa.”

“You must answer with less intemperance, signor,” interrupted the mask, in a quick and angry voice. “Confine yourself to answering questions, and do not anticipate them. What was your motive in seeking to enter into the service of the Venetian Republic?”

“To strike another blow,” replied Paoli, “at the hated foe of my country. I heard war was declared against Genoa; that

was one reason for preferring the service of Venice. Another was, that in the Marchese Tiepolo I had a second father, who would, I felt certain, forward my views."

" You accompanied the Marchese and his family to the masked ball, given at the Ducal Palace. Now, during the festivities at the palace, did anything unusual occur to you ? "

" Nothing uncommon, I am told, in Venice, signor ; but merely an attempt upon my life by some unknown miscreant."

" Were you able to arrest the author of this attempt upon your life ? "

" I was not so fortunate," replied Paoli. " He escaped by taking refuge in some of the passages leading from that part of the palace devoted to the festivities."

" Did you enter any of the chambers *not* set apart for the reception of the guests ? "

" I lost myself in pursuing the person who attempted my life. Two ushers, whom I encountered, informed me I was entering forbidden apartments ; and, on my giving my name and address, conducted me without the palace."

" Signor Paoli," continued the inquisitor, in a very marked tone, " previous to meeting the ushers of the palace, did you behold any other person, known or unknown, to you ? "

" I certainly was surprised," returned the Corsican, after a moment's pause, " on beholding, traversing the chambers of the Ducal Palace, a German leader of Condottieri, styled Duke Guarnieri."

" You are acquainted, then," demanded the inquisitor, " with Duke Guarnieri ? "

" I met him some months back in the Florentine States. Chance threw me in his way ; but our intimacy consisted in a very eager endeavour on the part of the Duke to take my life, in revenge for my having, the day previously, slain his only son, Ludovico Guarnieri, in defence of a party of travellers, attacked by him and his lawless adherents."

" Slew Ludovico Guarnieri !" echoed the Venetian, with a start, while two silent figures behind the inquisitor whispered for a moment.

There was a pause of some moments, during which the inquisitor drew an ivory tablet from his vest, looked at it, made some mark, and then said,—

" Was Duke Guarnieri alone when you saw him ? And was he aware that you beheld him ? "

" The German followed a guide, signor," replied the knight. " He could not be aware of my presence, as I was behind a pillar of the saloon."

"Now, Signor Paoli," continued the Venetian, speaking slowly and emphatically, "on the next two or three questions in a great measure rests your fate. Hitherto you have answered without hesitation. Answer me now in the same spirit. Where did you see Duke Guarnieri go after entering the gallery in which you beheld him ?"

"I saw him enter a chamber directly facing where I stood."

"Did you see within that chamber ?"

"It was but a very brief glance that I cast within that chamber ; so momentary, in truth, that what my gaze there rested upon was more like a vision, so rapidly did the door close."

"Nevertheless," quietly returned the questioner, in a somewhat sterner voice, "you *did* see within that chamber. What did you see ?"

"I had a rapid glance, signor, of a large table covered with crimson cloth, and round that table stood several signors unmasked."

"Were any of those unmasked signors," eagerly demanded the inquisitor, leaning forward, "known to you, Signor Paoli, by sight or remembrance ?"

During his examination, Paoli, though answering briefly to the questions put to him, was nevertheless busy with his thoughts. There was something more in his examination than the apparent purpose of finding him guilty of the charges laid against him. The evident anxiety of the inquisitor, as he continued his interrogations, especially the last few questions, caused the Corsican to pause for a moment at the last question.

"Perhaps," thought he, "I may by my answer be bringing destruction on others."

"You hesitate, Signor Paoli," said the Venetian, sternly. "Beware how you trifle with those appointed to hear you. I once more demand—Did you recognize within that chamber, into which you saw Duke Guarnieri enter, any countenance known to you ?"

"Signor," replied Paoli, calmly, "I have sworn to answer your questions briefly and truly. I tell you again, the time allowed me to look within that room was so momentary, and my acquaintance with the faces I was merely able to glance at so very limited, that I cannot positively assert, and still less swear, to the face of any individual in that chamber."

The inquisitor half rose from his chair, and stretched forth his hand towards a small silver bell upon the table. The other figures appeared agitated. But, re-seating himself, the inquisitor, in a low, bitter tone, said—

"Once more I bid you beware. There are other means at hand to unlock the unruly tongues of traitors."

The fierce temper of the Corsican was now roused, and the hot blood rushed to cheek and temple.

"Traitor!" echoed he, in a voice that startled all present, so deep and passionate were its tones—"Traitor! Who dares say a Paoli is a traitor? Where are your proofs? What single word or deed can you lay to my charge?"

"Silence, rash man!" exclaimed one of the hitherto silent signors behind the inquisitor. "You shall have proofs."

Making a sign, the secretary at the table opened a drawer, and, taking out a bundle of papers, selected two. They were letters.

"Hand one to the prisoner," said the questioner of Paoli. "Look at that address," he continued, as the Corsican, with some surprise, took the letter from the table.

"It is directed to me," replied the knight; "but I know neither the writing nor the letter, which I never had in my hand before."

"Take care, Signor Paoli, take care," said the Venetian, sneeringly. "Read its contents."

Paoli did so, and with perfect calmness.

"I can only say, signor," said he, "that the whole is an accursed falsehood—a tissue of improbabilities. I know nothing of it or its writer, and cannot understand the object of my name being so used."

"And yet, Signor Paoli, that letter, and two others much to the same purport, were found amongst your papers, and seized the same night you were arrested, when your apartments in the Tiepolo Palace were searched and your papers secured. You deny those letters?"

Laying his hand upon the bell, it rang clear and distinct in the silence that reigned around.

Paoli now awaited the result with considerable curiosity. He plainly perceived there was something deeper in the plot against him than the mere accusation of an anonymous letter, dropped into the lion's mouth, as he considered, by an agent of Duke Guarneri.

In a few moments the sable cloth was thrown back, and two figures, similar to those who served as his guides, came forward, conducting a tall man, closely muffled and masked. At a sign, the two familiars disappeared.

Turning towards the masked figure, who had advanced to within a few steps of the Corsican, the inquisitor said,—

"Swear by that crucifix to answer with truth any question I may demand."

The stranger took the oath required ; but Paoli, who observed his movements keenly, thought his hand shook as he grasped the image of his Redeemer.

"Now, signor, answer me," continued the inquisitor. "Do you recognize the face and person of the prisoner beside you ?"

"I do, signor," replied the stranger, in a low but audible voice.

Paoli thought he had heard the voice before ; but no effort could recall the time or person.

"Who is the prisoner ?" demanded the inquisitor.

"A Corsican by birth : his name Giacinto Paoli."

Turning to the secretary, the Venetian said,—

"Read aloud that letter of which the prisoner denies all knowledge."

In a distinct tone the secretary read the following lines :—

"Amico mio,—You were wrong to trust Beltramo Di Bergamo : he is too timid for a command, besides being devoted as a slave to the family of Nicolo Lioni—a greater tyrant than any of your Genoese rulers. However, we have guarded against that. Sixteen is now our number. The tolling of the bell of San Marco—never rung except by order of the Doge—is the signal. Your love of freedom, and hatred of tyrants, make you the fit associate of those who have sworn to crush every noble in Venice, and rid the earth of a race of despots."

After a moment's pause, the inquisitor demanded of the mask if he knew the writer of that letter ?

"Signor, I do."

"Name him."

"Bertucci Faliero, nephew of Marino Faliero, the Doge."

"And that letter was written," pursued the inquisitor, "and intended for whom ?"

"It was directed to Giacinto Paoli, and written by me."

Before a word could be said, Paoli strode across the chamber. His passion was roused beyond all control : in his rage, he saw not the confusion amongst the inquisitor and his colleagues, but, seizing the masked stranger in a grasp of iron, he tore the mask from his face, exclaiming,—

"Villain and liar ! What could have prompted you to such a crime ?"

As the mask fell to the ground, Paoli gazed with astonishment upon the features of the stranger, who was, in truth, Bertucci Faliero. Paoli had seen him often at the Palace Tiepolo. Before the Corsican's arrival, Bertucci was an eager suitor for the hand of the Marchese's daughter, the Lady Paulina.

In his astonishment, Paoli heeded not the loud ringing of the bell, at the sound of which six figures, in sable garments, hastily entered the chamber.

"Seize those traitors!" fiercely and loudly exclaimed the inquisitor.

The first that advanced was felled to the ground, senseless, by the excited Corsican, who, losing all command of his fiery temper, would, doubtless, have sacrificed his life and those of others, when a concealed door was hastily thrown open, and a signor, richly habited and unmasked, followed by three others, wearing their masks, entered the chamber.

At a signal from this signor, the familiars, who had drawn their short swords, worn beneath their mantles, fell back. Even Paoli stood transfixed; for in the signor, richly habited and unmasked, he beheld the features of the noblest of the Venetian nobility—one reverenced and loved by all classes, and whom Paoli knew to be the most powerful member of the Council of Ten—Giovanni Gradinegro, whom he had often seen at the Palace of the Marchese Tiepolo.

As Paoli stood looking at the Marchese Gradinegro, the masked signor behind him for an instant raised his mask. Starting with surprise, the Corsican beheld the features of Count Steno. With a warning gesture, the mask was replaced.

"Signor Paoli, this intemperate passion and outrage against your appointed judges," observed the Marchese Gradinegro, addressing the Corsican, "would in any court have led to fatal consequences. Had you mastered your temper but a very few moments, your deliverance was at hand; for I came hither for the express purpose of declaring you perfectly innocent of all the charges laid against you. How that knowledge has been obtained, it is not the custom of this tribunal to disclose. You were brought here on a most serious charge, at the very time a plot has been discovered, thanks to Divine Providence, that had for its intention not only to overthrow the existing government, but the massacre of the entire Venetian nobility. You can find no fault with your judge that he endeavoured, by the utmost ingenuity, to find you guilty or not guilty."

"Pardon me, my lord," interrupted Paoli, struck by the impressive manner and voice of Gradinegro, "I found no fault with my judge. My unpardonable intemperance and passion was first excited by being threatened with torture."

The Marchese started slightly, and looked round at Paoli's inquisitor. If the inquisitor beheld the look of Gradinegro, his mask prevented the betrayal of his feelings. Paoli continued,—

"This signor," pointing to Bertucci Faliero, who stood with folded arms, gazing with a look of fixed despair upon Gradinegro, "this signor was examined; and he stated that the letters, accusing me of treason, and, by their purport, leading my judges to suppose I was joined in the very plot of which you, my lord, speak, were written by him. God knows, I have borne much with patience; but when the signor, who was then masked, suddenly avowed that he it was that wrote the cursed letters, a burning desire to unmask the traitor overpowered my reason and judgment. That Bertucci Faliero should degrade himself thus, and for what reason—as I never, in word or deed, injured him—I leave it to him to say."

Giovanni Gradinegro, who was destined to be the next Doge of Venice, stood leaning his arm upon a chair, apparently listening to the Corsican.

"Bertucci Faliero," said the Marchese, in a low and melancholy tone of voice, addressing that individual, "you have already been tried and judged. Why—"

At that moment, the inquisitor who had examined Paoli rose from his chair, and, approaching the Marchese, whispered a sentence in his ear. Gradinegro started—paused a moment—and then said,—

"Be it so. Let the prisoners be removed to their cells till to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" bitterly muttered the unfortunate Faliero. Then, rapidly turning to the Corsican, he said, in a quick, agitated tone, "Signor Paoli, I have deeply wronged you. When brought here, it was not expected I would declare myself the author of those letters."

"Remove the prisoner!" exclaimed the inquisitor, Gradinegro having already left the chamber.

"Farewell!" exclaimed Faliero. "Forgive me. I spoke to save you. To-morrow will behold me hanging between the red columns of St. Mark, but my last breath shall be spent in a curse upon our tyrants."

As he struggled to utter those words, he was hurried from the chamber, as was also Paoli, and re-conducted to his cell.

CHAPTER XII.

THE EXECUTION.

THE memorable morning of the 17th of April broke over the broad lagune, and the lordly city of Venice, with all the splendour of a southern spring. At a very early hour, the piazzas of San Marco were thronged with countless numbers;

yet, though the sun shone, darting its bright beams upon pinnacles and towers—upon the noble column of the Piazza and Piazzetta of St. Mark—and though the waters of the lagune sparkled like gold, and the light barques of the Venetians, as they shot past, urged by the gentle breeze that merely played upon the waters, appeared like gigantic birds with their wings spread (for the latine sails of the early times, set “wing on wing,” as mariners term it in the Mcditerranean, have that appearance), yet, with all the beauty and splendour of the scene around, the vast crowd that thronged the square seemed struck by the goddess of Silence. Groups moved along with ominous looks—many with scowling features and violent gestures. But one thing was certain, namely, that all eycs were directed towards the red columns of St. Mark in the Piazzetta ; and certainly the sight that there met the eye was quite sufficient to erasc all the beauty of the surrounding scenery from the thoughts and sight of the multitudc.

Between the red columns, hung, some singly, some in groups, were numerous bodies ; while, in a more conspicuous manner, were suspended the two bodies of Bertucci Israello, admiral of the arsenal, and guardian of the Bucentaur, and Phillipo Calendaro, a seaman of much skill and repute. Both these conspirators, with a cruel precaution, were gagged previously to being ignominiously hung.

Leaving the dismayed citizens to gaze upon the unexpected and hideous scene before them, return we to Giacinto Paoli, on the 18th of April, 1355, the day following the execution of the conspirators. The door of his prison on that morning was thrown open, and two of his usual jailers entered the cell, followed by a masked personage carrying a large mantle and mask, which the Corsican was requested to put on, and follow his guides.

“One request, Signor Paoli,” observed his conductor, as they prepared to quit the cell. “If you value your liberty or life, preserve a strict silence, no matter what you either see or hear. If you follow this advice, in two days you will regain your liberty. Failure in doing so will lead to imprisonment, perhaps for life.

The speaker was evidently one of a higher station than those who accompanied him ; Paoli, therefore, considered this warning was given either by a friend, or by the order of one, for hitherto no word of any kind had passed between him and his jailers or guides.

After traversing innumerable passages, sometimes but dimly lighted by a single lamp at long intervals ; at others, led by

his guides through a labyrinth of dark passages ; they at length began to mount a long flight of stone stairs.

As they ascended, Paoli thought the sound of human voices reached his ear ; and in a few moments he became convinced that the confused hum of many tongues was audible. Having reached the summit of the stairs, and passed along a dark corridor, they stopped before a folding-door.

Paoli felt his arm grasped, as a voice whispered in his ear,—

“ Beware ! be silent ! ”

The next instant he was gently impelled through the door, and at once stood transfixed with horror at the scene before him, for the mask, though it concealed his features, did not obstruct his sight. At first, he was dazzled by the glorious light of day. But that passed off, and he gazed anxiously around. He first perceived that he was standing in a row of about twenty figures, habited and masked in exactly the same manner as himself. In fact, except for his towering stature, no distinction could be made between him and other individuals of the group. At a glance, Paoli saw that he was on one side of the platform on the summit of the great staircase leading into the Ducal Palace, styled the Giant's Stairs. The great folding-doors were closed ; but the murmur of countless voices from without came upon the ear. Before him was a sight that chilled his blood, as his eyes rested upon its principal features. It was a scene that impressed itself upon his memory with a startling vividness—one that was never forgotten in after life. In the middle of the great platform of the Giant's Stairs was a block, covered with crimson cloth ; beside it stood a figure there was no mistaking—it was the headsman of San Marco, leaning with his bare and brawny arms upon a long-handled and highly-polished axe. As usual with all the myrmidons of the secret tribunals of Venice, his features were concealed by a mask. Near the block stood a venerable friar, holding a crucifix, and at his feet knelt a human being. Upon a bench, covered with crimson cloth, sat ten signors, wrapped in crimson mantles, and masked. These were the ten rulers of Venice.

As Paoli gazed, scarcely breathing, the kneeling figure arose, and, standing erect, presented to the astonished and horror-stricken gaze of the Corsican the noble but pale features of the Doge of Venice, Marino Faliero.

“ Merciful God ! can this be possible ? ” thought Paoli, as he shudderingly beheld the noble old man advance with a firm step towards the executioner. He that in his youth had carried

the banner of the Lion in proud triumph over sea and land, knelt and laid his venerable head upon the block. The priest staggered forward, and held the crucifix to his lips, extending his hands over the white locks of the noble victim.

A signal was given, and the next instant Marino Faliero slept with his fathers.

“Throw open the great gates ! ” exclaimed the stern voice of a senator.

This being done, a mighty multitude, with hoarse murmurs, filled the hall. The body-guards of the Republic, in their gorgeous armour, kept back the mob, as one of the Ten commanded the executioner to hold out the gory head, while, casting aside his mask, he advanced to the edge of the platform, ejaculating,—

“Venetians, justice has been executed upon a great offender.” *

A profound and awful stillness for a moment pervaded the vast assemblage. The next, a wild and triumphant shout burst from the lips of a fickle populace—from the same base throats that, but twelve months before, and on the self-same spot, had greeted that gory head as their lord and master.

Shocked, disgusted, and sick at heart, Paoli felt his arm seized, and, having been conducted through the same door, without exchanging a single word with his conductors, he again found himself the solitary inmate of his prison-cell.

Two days after, he again was led into the chamber where his first examination took place. Only three persons occupied the room. Contrary to his expectation, all three were unmasked, but their features were totally unknown to him.

“Signor Paoli,” began one of the signors, “I am happy to inform you that in less than an hour you will quit these halls, and be restored to liberty. You have been accused of a State crime. Before now, such an accusation has cost a life. You have been declared free from all participation in the crimes laid to your charge. Nevertheless, we cannot hold you altogether free from error. It is therefore considered necessary, for State reasons, that you should be banished the city of Venice for a period of three years. Let it be understood, signor, that should you be found within the city or lagune, your life is forfeited to the State.”

Paoli felt his cheek flush, but he uttered not a word.

“Though banished from Venice,” continued the Venetian, “you are still at liberty to serve under her banner ; and all her dependencies and colonies are open to you. It is understood

* Historical—Lanuto.

that you wish to serve under the Republic. Do so with the courage and integrity you have hitherto manifested, and you will find, that if Venetian rulers can punish, they can also reward. You will be landed on the opposite shores of the lagune. The fleet of Admiral Pisani lies off Ravenna, waiting final orders. The galley of the Marchese Tiepolo is with the fleet. You can join her there. I need not, therefore, Signor Paoli, say more, nor remind you that any infringement of the sentence pronounced against you will be your ruin."

At a signal from the Venetian, Paoli was led from the chamber, immersed in profound and painful thought. Without heeding the tortuous paths through which he followed his guides, he came at length to the brink of a dark and narrow canal, on whose sluggish waters lay a long and hearse-like gondola. Two figures, muffled and masked, sat under the canopy of the boat ; while six oarsmen, with the badges of the Republic on their arms, reclined on the benches.

Paoli was requested to take his seat beside the two silent figures. The black drapery was then drawn closely down, and the gondola moved slowly through the canal. Presently, the light of day came faintly—then stronger and stronger ; and Paoli became conscious that they were moving through one of the frequented canals of Venice. He heard the splash of oars, the songs of the gondoliers, and the murmur of many voices, as they passed and repassed the countless barques navigating the water-streets of Venice.

During the two hours that the voyage lasted, not a word was spoken by those within the gondola. At the end of that period, the keel of the boat grated upon a shingly beach.

One of the masked signors now motioned to Paoli to follow him, and, leaving the gondola, they leaped upon the strand. Wrapped in a deep reverie, the Corsican scarcely heeded the masked personage that followed his steps, as he ascended the somewhat steep bank where the boat touched the beach.

Having reached the summit, he paused and looked back over the scarcely rippling waters of the broad lagune that lay sparkling in the sun's rays between him and lordly Venice.

"Yes," soliloquized Paoli, as he gazed, unconscious of the presence of the masked figure that still stood within a few steps of where he paused—"Yes," and he spoke half aloud, "thou art fair and lovely to look at ; but, gorgeous and magnificent as thou art, and styled Queen of the Adriatic, I would rather, now I know thee, have no canopy but that which at this moment covers me, than breathe the polluted air which sighs through thy gilded chambers!"

“ Speak not so harshly of my native city, Giacinto,” said a voice behind him.

Turning round with a start of joyful surprise, he beheld Count Steno by his side. The friends grasped each other’s hands with fervour, while Steno led Paoli beneath the shelter of a low fence.

“ Here we are removed from observation. My time is short, and I have much to say.”

Seating themselves upon the ruins of some former temple, Count Steno resumed,—

“ You have had, *amico mio*, a painful trial of our Venetian rulers, and been somehow most strangely mixed up, though perfectly innocent, in one of the vilest plots that ever entered the human mind.”

“ But surely—for my brain is bewildered with what I have seen—surely,” exclaimed Paoli, “ your venerable Doge could have no part in this plot. Merciful Heaven! even were he guilty, could not his station—his grey hairs—and, above all, his former glory, save him from so ignoble a death?”

“ Not with the rulers of Venice,” returned Steno. “ No; his crime was no less than the overturning of the State, and the massacre of the entire nobility. But time passes. I must not loiter, or even I may be made to feel the rod.” And Steno smiled somewhat bitterly. “ Listen to me, Giacinto. Harbour no feeling of hostility to Venice for what you have suffered. As to the banishment, it is nothing; nearly half the time specified will expire before this expedition can be accomplished. The first brilliant action you perform will assuredly cause the revocation of your sentence. Besides, believe me, you are about the only individual accused of a State crime, innocent or guilty, that ever left the dungeons of St. Mark without being put to the question.”

“ For that I may thank you,” replied Paoli.

“ Nay, Paoli, you had powerful friends besides Michaeilo Steno. I first heard of your arrest from Juliano, who most wisely, being an expert diver and swimmer, swam aboard a fishing-boat, and then, without a moment’s loss of time, found me out. I managed to get you confined where you were; otherwise, you would have been put under the leads; and this being near summer, you would have stood a good chance of being roasted. I next applied to the Marchese Spolino, with whose daughter, Bianca, you are a special favourite. And, to tell you the truth, when you were struck by the assassin at the Ducal Palace, I thought it was a friendly warning from some lover of hers.

“ As a member of the Council of Forty, I soon learned that

you were accused of being a spy; and I ascertained that the accusation came through that accursed channel, the lion's mouth. But, to my astonishment, I soon found that you stood in a much more dangerous predicament. Your papers were seized; and, to my utter amazement, I learned that a most frightful plot had that day been discovered by Beltramo Di Bergamo; as one of the conspirators he betrayed the whole affair, names of the chief plotters, &c., to the Lioni, his patron, in order to save his life.

"Beltramo was secured. Amongst numerous persons seized was a squire of Duke Guarnieri; for you must know that the unfortunate Marino Faliero was in secret treaty with this quondam friend of yours, and actually had a conference with him in the Ducal Palace the night of the masked ball."

"It was my declining to communicate my knowledge of that meeting," said Paoli, "that was near leading me to the torture which I should undoubtedly have undergone but for the opportune arrival of the Marchese Gradinegro."

"Yes," continued Steno, "and it was your keeping the occurrence of that night from my knowledge that led to your being arrested. But of one thing you are ignorant. The inquisitor who examined you was as bitter a rival of yours as the unfortunate Bertucci Faliero. You were examined a whole hour before the appointed time; for the Marchese intended being present at your examination without your being aware of it; the preference shown you by the Lady Paulina raised up against you two powerful and vindictive enemies. Bertucci Faliero was one; the other's name must remain untold. Several of the persons seized were put to the torture. Guarnieri's squire broke down at once, and confessed his master's having passed forty-eight hours in Venice. I was present; and, suspecting that your friend, the Duke, was the party who had accused you of being a spy, I examined the prisoner; but he very stoutly denied all knowledge of the letters. An extra turn of the wheel, however, altered his confession; and you were cleared. There still remained the three letters found amongst your papers. Bertucci Faliero had undergone the torture, and confessed his share of the plot to massacre the nobility; but, of course, was not suspected of having anything to do with you. No mention was made of your name. Remorse, and a knowledge that his fate was past hope, caused him to accuse himself, when brought up to condemn you, by swearing to his knowledge of the letters being written to you. However, for State reasons, I must say no more upon that subject. Had we not arrived as we did, you certainly would have played the devil amongst the

familiaris of St. Mark ; and assuredly to this outbreak of passion you owe your three years of banishment—a very trifling punishment to you, my dear Giacinto, whatever it might be to a Venetian wedded to the pleasures of Venice. The intense anxiety of the good Marchese Tiepolo, and the ladies Julia and Paulina—ah ! my friend, how is it,” added Steno, in a tone of much feeling, “ how is it you can have been so blind, or so indifferent, to the smiles of one of the fairest and sweetest of the daughters of Venice ? ”

Paoli bent his head in mental abstraction : he pressed the hand of his friend, but did not trust his voice to speak. Could he have returned that night to Venice, he would have thrown himself at the feet of Paulina, and supplicated for that love which he had so heedlessly cast away. But it was not to be. Though disappointed in the first love of her young heart, Paulina was yet to love, and be beloved, and to give birth to a long line of a princely race.

There was a silence of some moments between the young men, each employed with his own thoughts. At length Steno spoke, saying,—

“ We must part, Giacinto. Three years in our youth is nothing. If we are spared, we shall meet, please God, in better and happier times. Here is a long letter from the Marchese ; and this,” holding forth a well-remembered jewel, “ is a token of Paulina’s friendship. Julia sends this also, with her sincere wish for your prosperity and happiness.”

Paoli received the gifts with a sigh of deep regret. He looked at the costly jewel of the fair Venetian till his eyes grew moist, and his heart beat with a quicker pulsation.

The Count beheld his friend’s emotion.

“ You may roam the world, Giacinto,” said Steno, pressing the Corsican’s hand, and looking fixedly in his face, “ you may sip from the cup of pleasure ; but nowhere will you find truer hearts than in the place you leave behind you. Look,” pointing to a thick cluster of trees about a mile from where they stood, “ behind yon coppice you will find your squire, Pulini, your mails, and two stout steeds to convey you to Ravenna. Everything has been thought of and provided by the Marchese on board the galley. You will be well received by Pisani, the admiral ; and his son longs for your arrival. You will soon distinguish yourself ; for the Dalmatian coast is lined, I am told, with the war galleys of Genoa. And now, God bless you, dear friend ! ”

The gay, thoughtless, volatile Count Steno was deeply affected. The friends embraced. They looked in each other’s features, as if to treasure the remembrance ; and, with many

warm and grateful remembrances from Giacinto to the Marchese, Marchesa, and family, Michaello Steno and Paoli parted.

CHAPTER XIII.

AGNES ALVIANO.

WE must now request our readers to step with us across the wide space of sea and shore, and permit us to land them in the middle of the Byzantium of the Greeks ; then very different indeed from the far-famed Stamboul of the Turks. The mansion of the Venetian merchant, Bartolomeo Alviano, though its front looked into one of the best streets of the city, the rear of the mansion, and the part inhabited by the family of the wealthy merchant, commanded a view of one of the loveliest scenes the human eye could wish to rest upon.

Standing upon the verandah, that stretched along the centre length of the mansion, the gaze, after passing a rather extensive and tastefully arranged garden, and some low houses and warehouses bordering the waters of the harbour, roamed over that lovely lake, with its beautifully sloping hills, rich in vegetation, in groves, and studded with countless mansions, erected in the purest taste of Grecian architecture. The glorious waters of the Bosphorus next came in view, studded with countless picturesque crafts of the middle ages, such as the Carrick, with its ponderous and towering masts, the gorgeous galleys of the Emperor, with their silken streamers, and flags flaunting in the breeze, and the singular but picturesque barques of the Thracian fishermen. Skimming the surface of the water, like birds, were hundreds of latines of various forms from the islands, mingling with the long and sharp war-galleys of the Florentines and Venetians. The singular and diversified costumes of sailors of the many nations and tribes frequenting the waters of the Bosphorus, gave additional animation to the prospect ; and the mariners' songs—for many of the wild boatmen of Scutari and the sailors from the Black Sea sang their rude, but still pleasing, national ditties, as they plied the oar, or set their lofty sails—ascended at times, clear and distinct, to the ear of those who either walked or reposed beneath the shade of the verandah. Numerous beautiful and rare plants stood in handsome vases in different parts of this balcony ; many climbed and spread their luxuriant blossoms over the trellis work of the pillars, and shed a rich perfume.

It was in the month of September, of the same year in

which the ill-fated Doge of Venice lost his throne and life. The great heat of the climate was then tempered by fine breezes from the sea ; and though the sky was cloudless, the rays of the evening sun could be borne without suffering inconvenience.

Seated at the open windows of a magnificent saloon, looking into the balcony just described, were two ladies ; the younger employed in reading, the elder in embroidering some fauncy ornaments.

The elder lady, though about forty years of age, was still very handsome, and graceful in person. She was the Signora Tolmeo, widow of a Venetian merchant, who had been engaged in commerce in the then small town and port of Livorno. The signor was distantly connected with the old cavalero, Tolosino, whom we encountered in the early chapters of this volume, as the guardian of the young Agnes Alviano.

The Signora Tolmeo had lost her husband by the great pestilence, as it was styled, and unfortunately at a period of great embarrassment. The Cavalero Tolosino immediately offered her an asylum ; for, during the few weeks that Agnes had passed at her castle, both ladies became attached to each other, and when Agnes was embarking for Byzantium she implored the Signora Tolmeo to accompany her and reside with her for the future.

Having no family or home, and few connections, the widow, who had learned to love the gentle girl with a mother's affection, willingly consented.

And a great happiness it proved to both parties. The Signor Alviano received with the greatest kindness the companion his daughter had selected ; appointed her a suite of apartments ; and soon found that a most pleasing addition had been made to his family.

At this period Agnes Alviano had reached her eighteenth year. If she had been accounted lovely and fascinating as a girl springing into womanhood, how much more captivating and beautiful was she at the period we now present her to our readers.

Above the general standard of the sex, her fine and graceful figure derived an air of conscious dignity from the purity and beauty of her mind. Her hair, of glossy blackness, corresponded with brilliant eyes of the same dark hue ; and the finely arched and pencilled eyebrows, upon a forehead exquisitely fair, left the beholder nothing to wish. In mind, temper, and disposition Agnes Alviano was all the fondest parent could wish or pray for ; and the worthy Signor

Alviano's whole heart and soul was wrapped up in the love of his only and lovely daughter.

Before the outbreak between Venice and Genoa many of the nobility of the two rival republics visited at the hospitable mansion of the wealthy merchant. Many Venetian families of consideration dwelt in Byzantium ; and, in the adjoining colony of Pera, a Genoese settlement, were residing some of the highest Genoese nobility.

The court of the Emperor Palæsgus, though fearfully reduced in power and magnificence, was still, though near its final extinction, a gay and splendid one.

If Paulina was the reigning beauty of the Venetian aristocracy, Agnes Alviano, the heiress of the wealthy merchant, was the boast of the European maidens of Byzantium. Many a Venetian youth strove to gain her affections ; but we cannot look into that wonderful mystery—a woman's heart ; for though many a suitor could boast a handsome person, a proud name, and knightly deeds, the maiden's heart, in September, 1355, was still apparently unconquered.

“*Cara mia*,” exclaimed the Signora Tolmeo, looking up from her embroidery, and perceiving that the fair Agnes sat with her book upon her knee, while her gaze was fixed as if on vacancy, “*Cara mia*, you are in the clouds.”

Agnes smiled, saying, “In truth I was, in fancy, far from Byzantium. I suppose my father's intention of quitting this imperial city has sent my mind back to Venice. I was just then,” continued the maiden, “thinking of my cousins, especially of Paulina.”

“And,” interrupted the signora, “of this new lover of hers, who, report declares, will speedily scatter his Venetian rivals from their dreams. Did not the young Count Morisini say their marriage was to take place the same day Lady Julia gives her hand to Count Steno ?”

“Something of the kind he certainly said,” replied Agnes thoughtfully. “Still Paulina, in her letters, brought by the Count now nearly seven months ago, mentions nothing of the sort ; but merely describes this Corsican knight as one of the finest specimens of the *preux chevalier* she ever beheld. How very strange, *carissima*, that Paulina's lover, if lover he be, and my gallant deliverer should be one and the same person (for it is not very likely that two individuals with one appellation should be rambling over Italy in search of adventures), and that he should, for a time, be a resident in the palace of my uncle. The Marchese, Paulina says, is as much attached to him as to a favourite son.”

"Did he not mention to the Cavalero Tolosino," inquired the signora, "where he was going when he so opportunely released you from the hands of that German robber?"

"In truth," replied Agnes, "but little time was allowed for conversation. My guardian was extremely anxious to get as far away from the scene of our disaster as possible. The knight merely said his name was Giacinto Paoli, a Corsican exile, and that he was proceeding to Florence. I cannot think how it is," continued Agnes, "that no vessel from Venice has reached this port. It is now more than six months since we received those letters by the Count Alberto Morisini."

"Is there not a report that the mouth of the Adriatic is blockaded by a powerful Genoese fleet under Admiral Doria? If so, that easily accounts for no intelligence from Venice," remarked the signora. "Indeed, your father fears a long and tedious contest in those seas; and that reason, combined with some others, has induced him to wind up his mercantile affairs in his part of the world."

As the signora spoke the door opened, and the Signor Alviano entered the chamber, holding a large packet of letters, opened and unopened. The Signor Alviano was then in his fifty-sixth year, and looked even younger. He was of middle height, and somewhat robust; but his countenance was attractive in the highest degree, impressing the beholder with a full conviction of the merchant's benignant and truly generous disposition.

"Well, here is news at last," exclaimed he, as he seated himself by his daughter, after pressing a kiss, as he usually did, on her fair and open brow. "But sorry am I to say," and he spoke with much feeling, "we have dismal news enough in all conscience."

"Nothing has happened?" questioned Agnes, looking anxiously at her father as he sorted his letters.

"Nothing, nothing, my dear girl," replied the merchant, "to any of our kith and kin. There, there are three letters for you, my love, from your cousins. There have been sad doings in Venice; and, strange to say, this Corsican knight, the young Count Paoli—for Count he is, and his father before him, and no nobler name in Corsica than Paoli—before the first invasion of that island—"

"But, dear father," interrupted Agnes, "you forget. And, in truth," she added, smiling, and laying her taper fingers on his, "whenever Corsica is mentioned, everything passes into oblivion, except that little speck on the wide ocean."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the Signor Alviano; "little speck do you call it? As fine and high-spirited a race—"

"Yes, yes, father, granted. I have, you know, seen a specimen; and, I confess, if they at all resemble him, they are not amiss. But let us know about this dismal news, and the Signor Paoli."

"Ha, there it is!" exclaimed the merchant, looking somewhat archly in his daughter's face. "By St. Mark, this wandering knight somehow occupies as much of your thoughts as his country, I confess, does of mine. Some day or other I will tell you why."

Had the Signora Tolmeo looked at the maiden as her father uttered the last sentence, she would have greatly admired the brilliant colour of her cheeks and temples.

"I have a considerable budget of news for you," resumed the merchant, "some of which will astonish you not a little. These letters came in a Venetian carrick, which left Venice after the fleet of Pisani had sailed to meet the Genoese galleys which were cruising off the coast of Dalmatia. Her captain saw the two fleets approach each other; but a tremendous gale separated them. During the storm, he succeeded in escaping the enemy. He has a valuable cargo, consigned to me from the Marchese Tiepolo—the last which a Venetian noble will ever embark. This I will explain another time—it is a new law. The sad news I have to relate is the miserable fate of the conqueror of Zara. The noble but ill-fated Marino Faliero, being discovered as the originator of a fearful plot to massacre the entire nobility of Venice, was beheaded by order of the Council of Ten."

"Merciful Providence, how horrid!" exclaimed both ladies. "A Doge of Venice—an old man of eighty—brought to the block!"

"Neither a great name, mighty deeds, nor venerable age, weigh as anything in the scales of Venetian justice, when opposed to the slightest treason to the State," replied the merchant. "But the most extraordinary part of the intelligence I have received in my letters from the Marchese Tiepolo, is, that the Signor Paoli was actually arrested and thrown into a dungeon, by order of the Council, on a charge of being a treasonable spy. He was examined, and, though finally declared innocent, was sentenced to three years' banishment from the Dogano—which means the city of Venice and its three islands. The Marchese tells me that the story is too long and too intricate to be now detailed in all its particulars."

Agnes looked at her father with a perplexed gaze. Her eyes sparkled, and her colour heightened, as she said,—

"You deal in riddles, dear father. What on earth can induce the Signor Paoli to wander into this part of the world?"

"The Marchese Tiepolo," returned the Signor Alviano, "fitted out a magnificent galley for this war, and gave the command of her to Paoli. Although banished from Venice, he may reside in, or visit any, of the colonies; and the State also granted him the required document, permitting him to hold any command under the banner of St. Mark. We may now daily expect the Venetian fleet in our waters; and, in truth, it is time; for so audacious have the Genoese colonists of Pera become, and so miserably weak and pusillanimous is the Greek Government, that there is no knowing how far their insolence might extend if not kept in check by a stronger force than the emperor can command. And now I must leave you, my child, to peruse your own letters; and I have little doubt that you will find much more news and more minute particulars of all that has taken place, than my worthy friend the Marchese has given me."

So saying, the merchant Alviano retired to his counting-house.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MERCHANT.

PAULINA TIEPOLO did in truth write fully and clearly to a cousin she loved as dearly as a cherished sister. Neither hesitation nor mystery, envy nor jealousy, was in the noble heart of the Venetian maiden. She gave Agnes a full account of the late unhappy events in Venice; spoke of Paoli with a warm and delicate feeling; confessed her heart had been in considerable danger, and was only saved by a chance circumstance which had revealed the Corsican's meeting with Agnes. Paulina declared it was her firm belief that Giacinto's iron heart was only to be won by her cousin, and ended a very long letter (especially for that unletter-writing age) by solemnly saying, that if she (Agnes) had a heart she could call her own, to exchange it fearlessly with the one she felt convinced the knight was most anxious to lay at her feet.

To say that Agnes neither blushed, nor that her heart did not quicken its pulsation during the reading of Paulina's letter, would, I fear, be false. We write of a most romantic age; nevertheless, we do not mean that Agnes had actually fallen in love with the Corsican knight at the period of their meeting in the Val d'Arno, but his gallantry and courage, his youthful features and magnificent form, were often before her mind's eye; and as none of the young nobility of Venice who frequented her father's mansion in any way equalled her

delivcer in person, manner, or features, she continued mistress of her own heart up to the arrival of her cousin Paulina's letter. Besides, although nearly two years had elapsed since her adventure with Ludovico Guarneri, the remembrance of that moment of peril was constantly kept alive in her mind by her father, who was perpetually talking of the Paoli family, of Corsica, and its struggles for freedom with the Genoese. Though surprised at her father's sudden predilection—for so she considered it—for everything Corsican, the maiden very willingly listened, wondering how a Venetian had become acquainted with the history of so remote an island, with which the Venetians had no manner of commercial dealings.

The Signor Alviano often declared he would willingly give a third of his wealth to be able to thank the preserver of his beloved daughter in person.

From the period of the arrival of the letters from Venice the worthy merchant was in a state of perpetual movement and bustle. His anxiety for the arrival of the fleet, and his ardent desire to behold the Signor Paoli, kept him in daily journeys from the Faro to the arsenal to make inquiries. From the former place a great extent of the Sea of Marmora was visible, and the approach of Pisani's fleet, which was anxiously looked for, would be descried from the lofty Faro many hours before its arrival opposite Byzantium.

On the 25th of September, 1355, the Venetian fleet, under Admiral Pisani, entered the Propontis. The galley of Paoli had proved one of the fastest in the fleet, and during the five months' cruising along the Dalmatian shores and in the eastern seas, he had already highly distinguished himself, and procured the favour and protection of the admiral, fighting and capturing two fine and richly laden galleys off the island of Brioni, when separated from the fleet during the great storm that prevented the meeting of the hostile fleets. In rejoining the galleys of Pisani he had also rendered a signal service to the admiral, and saved his galley and five others from being wrcked upon an unsuspected reef during a heavy gale. The pilot of the Corsican's galley knew the reef and the only passage through it, and, boldly carrying a press of canvas, he passed "the admiral's galley, which, being too disabled by the gale to avoid the danger, took the lead, at the same time hoisting signals to follow his galley, as the passage was known to his pilot. Paoli steered through the boiling surges with skill and coolness; the admiral and five of the largest war galleys followed in safcty. At Mitylene, where they afterwards anchored, Paoli publicly received the thanks of the admiral, and the pilot received a substantial reward.

It was with feelings of excitement and pleasure that Paoli entered the Sea of Marmora, and rapidly approached Byzantium. With a favourable breeze, they soon brought in view the heights of Scutari and the seven hills on which Byzantium stood, with its four hundred and seventy-eight towers, which then, in a circuit of nearly eighteen miles, studded the long terrace of her walls. Soon the eye could trace the gentle curve of the Chrysoceras, or Golden Horn, an arm of the Propontis which forms the port of the city, and bathes the north-western side of the unequal triangle on which the city stands. The Acropolis, as the apex of this triangle was called, is, at the present day, covered with the glittering buildings and gardens of the Seraglio. Opposite is Scutari, and there begins the mouth of the Thracian Bosphorus. From the fortress of Galata to the spot now known as the Seraglio point, at the period of our tale a distance of more than five hundred yards, a massive double chain stretched across and guarded the entrance of the harbour.

Struck with the magnificence and imposing appearance of all around him, Paoli followed the admiral, and, shortly after, the galleys dropped anchor under the protecting ramparts of Byzantium.

Scarcely had Paoli moored his galley, before he perceived a very fine eight-oared barge with a crimson awning push from the side of the admiral's galley and pull towards his vessel. The curtains of the canopy were drawn up, and Paoli, as it rapidly approached, beheld a signor seated beneath the awning. He was alone. In a few moments the barge shot alongside, and Paoli, seeing that it was the wish of the stranger to come on board, ordered the side-ladders to be lowered. Another moment and the Signor Alviano stood upon the deck of the Lion, and, scarcely taking time to introduce himself, so eager and excited was his manner, he seized the hand of the knight, who no sooner heard his name than, almost equally excited, he led the merchant, who all the time was heartily shaking his hand and welcoming him to Byzantium, into the handsome cabin of the galley.

"This is positively the happiest moment I have enjoyed since my child returned to her father's arms, after many years' absence, Signor Paoli," exclaimed the worthy merchant, looking at the same time with visible admiration at the glowing features and stalwart frame of the Corsican. "I little expected," continued he, "a few weeks back, ever to have the pleasure of embracing and thanking the deliverer of my only child."

"And verily, Signor Alviano," returned Paoli, "I little thought, some months back, when a prisoner in the dungeons

of St. Mark, ever to see the glorious light of day, much less to have the pleasure of pressing the hand of the father of the fair maiden to whom it was my good fortune to offer assistance."

At this moment, Paoli's squire entered the cabin to say that the barge of the admiral's son, with the young Count Pisani himself, was steering for the Lion. As Pulini spoke, the merchant turned round, and the squire's gaze falling on his features, he started back, with a look of extreme astonishment, while the merchant himself changed colour slightly, but immediately resumed his usual look. Paoli did not perceive the strange manner or action of his squire; for at the moment he had turned to look through the stern-windows of the galley, to ascertain if the Count Pisani was coming on board.

"Will you excuse me a moment, Signor Alviano?" said Paoli; "I see my friend Pisani is approaching."

"I know the young man well," replied the merchant. "When he was but a boy, I have frequently admired his spirit and courage. On his first visit here, long ago, he was a favourite guest at my mansion. Agnes had not then returned from Venice, and he used to flatter me by saying my little girl would, in time, become the flower of Venetian maidens."

A thought crossed the mind of the Corsican at that moment, but he chased it away, for it was not a pleasing one; and, followed by the Signor Alviano, he ascended to receive the Count, who had already reached the deck. After pressing Paoli's hand, the young Pisani took the offered palm of the worthy merchant, saying, with a smile,—

"Ah! Signor Alviano, you have found the elixir of life. By St. Mark, time is as nought! You look younger than ever; though now, let me see, by all that's lovely—and that's your fair daughter Agnes—it's ten years since we met!"

"As lively as ever, Count," said the merchant; "but the sail ten years have changed the slight stripling into a very proper man."

"*Santa Madonna!* I trust you do not flatter," exclaimed Pisani, laughing. "And most devoutly do I hope the fair maidens of this city may think the same. But tell me, Gia-cinto, what think you of all you see? Here we are at last, and I trust we may enjoy ourselves a little, after five months' monotonous cruising; though, by-the-bye, you had the luck to break its stupidity by some sharp blows with the enemy. I bring you permission from the admiral to spend a few days—only a few days, I am sorry to say—ashore."

"And during those few days," interposed the merchant, "I insist upon both of you becoming my guests."

"With all my heart, with all my heart, Signor Alviano!" ex-

claimed Pisani. "I long to see your fair daughter, and to have a little chat over the past. Perhaps she has totally sunk all remembrance of poor Venice, by contrasting its sombre canals and calm lagune with the gorgeous scenery of this fairy land."

Three months passed over on the rapid wings of time. Let us see what effect that short space of life had upon the fortunes of our hero. It is, in truth, a very brief space; and yet a kingdom and a monarchy have fallen in that short interval, after a dynasty of five hundred years. To Paoli that period altered the destiny of his life. He had vowed to devote to the fair Agnes his future existence; and, it must be confessed, she most willingly accepted the vow. The merchant Alviano felt infinitely greater delight in hearing his blushing daughter confess that she had bestowed her heart upon a fortuneless exile, than if she had pledged it to the noblest in Venice.

There was one, however, who beheld the fast-growing love of the fair Agnes with a disturbed eye, and that was Giovanni Pisani, the nephew of the admiral. Noble, generous, and chivalric, of a fine person, handsome features, and highly descended, he had even, when a mere youth—and he visited at the Palace Tiepolo—beheld the growing beauty of Agnes with admiration and youthful love. But now, when he saw her in all the pride and grace of full-grown womanhood—every charm increased and perfected—Pisani, without a thought but that he should succeed, allowed his heart to feast upon the loveliness that was never destined to be his.

Before the three months had expired, though he knew not that the tale of love was told and heard, and listened to with heaving bosom and beating heart, yet he had seen enough to satisfy him that, in the Corsican exile—the soldier, with his sword for his sole inheritance—he had a most dangerous rival.

To a noble and generous spirit like that of Pisani, perhaps our readers may think, however painful the trial might be, the prize he so thirsted for would be abandoned to his more fortunate rival. Alas! young love is a sad tyrant, and sorely tries even the noblest heart. Pisani's manner insensibly changed towards Paoli, who, too absorbed in the charm that bound him, when in the presence of Agnes, perceived it not.

During the three months much had taken place besides the exchange of two young hearts. Admiral Pisani had succeeded in persuading the Greek emperor to espouse the cause of the Venetians against their mutual foe, the Genoese. But such was the miserable and fallen state of the once mighty empire, that the utmost the emperor could do was to promise

to equip and fully furnish eight galleys to join the fleet of Pisani. Being now satisfied at having gained the object of his visit to Byzantium, the admiral sailed for the winter quarters of his fleet, leaving the younger Pisani, and Paoli, and the crews of two Venetian galleys, to assist in the equipment and fitting-out of the emperor's galleys ; as also to keep the Genoese colony of Pera in check, and to give notice of the movements of the enemy in that quarter. Thus Paoli, in a certain measure, remained under the command of the younger Pisani.

Paoli now found but little time to spend in the society of his betrothed, for such she was ; though, for several reasons, their mutual engagement was not openly declared. Pisani required the presence of Giacinto every hour of the day in the arsenal ; for the Greeks are proverbially slow and indolent, and need constant watching. In fact, everything was yet to be done to the unfinished galleys of the emperor.

Still, an hour or so of the evenings was always spent in the company of the merchant's family. The Signor Alviano was very busily engaged in winding up his mercantile affairs—as he resolved to quit Byzantium, at all events, the following spring. Paoli, until the termination of the war, could not think for a moment of giving up the command of his galley, and the Signor Alviano would find it absolutely necessary to return to Venice, to settle his commercial transactions with the Marchese Ticpolo. Now, as the Corsican was banished that city for three years, the merchant purposed, as soon as possible, to leave Venice, and return for a time to Florence.

Such were the intentions of the merchant, in hastily thinking over the subject ; but no definite plan could be adopted in the present posture of public affairs at Venice, which appeared to be on the eve of a long war.

One evening, when our hero sat listening to the fine voice of Agnes, who accompanied herself on the harp,—the Signora Tolmeo being, as usual, busy with her embroidery,—Giovanni Pisani entered the room. Had any of the parties present paid attention to the Venetian's countenance, they would have perceived a sad change pass over his truly handsome features ; his brows were knit, and his eyes flashed as he beheld the position of the lovers ; and, scarcely returning the kind salutation of the party, he threw himself upon an ottoman, without a word, and his strange silence and manner attracted the observation of all. To one of Paoli's kind inquiries, the young Count said he was heated, having dined that day with some of the chief officers of the emperor's body guard. After a pause, during which Agnes laid aside her harp, looking at Pisani with rather a dis-

turbed and anxious look, the latter said, with an effort to recover his usual manner and tone,—

“I am sorry, Paoli, to interrupt the delightful mode in which I see you pass your evenings ; but we must not neglect our duty to the Republic, nevertheless.”

“I trust, Pisani,” returned the Corsican, “that, although only a volunteer in the service of the State, my duty has never been neglected.”

Agnes turned slightly pale, for the tone of Paoli was cold and haughty.

“I say nothing about neglect on your part, Paoli,” rejoined Pisani, with a look at Agnes ; “but the fact is, I received, yesterday, important despatches from the emperor for the Venetian admiral, which must reach him as soon as possible. You are aware that this morning the Genoese garrison of Pera have again insulted the emperor.”

“Yes,” replied Paoli, quietly, “I heard that a large piece of rock was discharged from one of their ballistic engines into one of the Greek carricks, and that the pusillanimous Greeks were in great consternation.”

“Ah !” said Pisani, “you heard this much ; but perhaps you did *not* hear that on the emperor demanding the reason of such an outrage, during the short cessation of hostilities—which, by-the-bye, expires after to-morrow—the Genoese commander very coolly replied they were rejoiced to find the city was within range of their machines.”

“A pretty pass,” returned Paoli, “the Roman empire is coming to, to be thus insulted by the insignificant colony of a far-distant Republic !”

“Ah ! well, we have only to look to the consequence as it regards the interest of Venice,” pursued Pisani. “For my own part, I am sorry,” and he looked very markedly at Agnes,—“I am sorry to be obliged to deprive the ladies of your very agreeable society ; for I fear you must sail after to-morrow for Negropont, where the admiral is ; for it is very certain his fleet will have to leave their snug quarters before the spring commences. It is also reported by a barque from Mitylene that numerous cruisers from the Genoese fleet have been seen off the entrance of the Sea of Marmora. But your galley is a very fast one ; and, in truth, somehow, better officered and manned than any in the fleet.”

“Will there not be considerable risk,” asked the merchant’s daughter, with a slight tremor of voice, “in a single galley, at this time of the year, running through the Straits while the mouth is blockaded by Genoese cruisers ?”

“Well, I confess,” replied Pisani, in rather a sneering tone,

“to the Signor Paoli there will be somewhat more danger than to another, as I believe the Genoese have placed a very high value on his head should he be recognized, if captured——”

“No fear of that, fair Agnes,” interrupted Paoli, rising and speaking cheerfully and calmly. Then, taking the maiden’s hand, he added, “the more danger, the more glory ; and I fully expect to return to thank the lovely owner of this fair hand for her interest in the poor exile’s fate.”

Respectfully kissing the hand he held, he quitted the chamber without taking the slightest notice of Pisani.

The Count looked after the majestic figure of the Corsican, biting his lip, as if in bitterness of thought. When he turned round, he perceived that the merchant’s daughter had withdrawn by another door.

With a slight frown on his brow, he bowed to the Signora Tolmeo, and followed the knight to the arsenal.

CHAPTER XV.

THE VOYAGE.

WITH the first glimmering of dawn Paoli left the port of Byzantium, and, with a favourable breeze, stood out into the Sea of Marmora.

In his own mind, he felt satisfied that his then voyage might have been dispensed with, and that it was merely a *ruse* of the younger Pisani to get him out of the way in order to urge his own suit with the gentle Agnes. The knight, feeling neither annoyed nor uneasy, and having perfect confidence in the truth of his fair betrothed, and in her father’s unflinching honour, sailed for Negropont, with the determination, if fortune should favour him, of achieving some exploit worthy of the fine craft he commanded, and the gallant crew with which she was manned. With a fair breeze, he ran along the Asiatic coast, knowing that the Genoese barques—bound for the Black Sea—steered along that shore. But as he approached the Straits, the wind suddenly veered several points, and, before many hours, blew a heavy gale in from the Archipelago. In the end, he was forced to take shelter under the lee of a low point jutting out from the eastern shore. Several boats passed through the Straits, scudding before the gale, which caused Paoli to keep strict watch for a vessel of sufficient importance, and carrying the Genoese flag, to induce him to give chase.

The fourth day—the gale rather increasing than otherwise—the man on the look-out gave notice of three large vessels making through the Straits ; the largest, a double-banked

galley, chasing the others, which were shortly perceived—one to be a carrick of the largest class, showing Venetian colours, the other a fine Greek caravel.

Being prepared, and his crew eager for action, the pilot, by the orders of Paoli, slipped his cables, and, standing across the course of the advancing vessels, hoisted the broad banner of St. Mark. The Genoese galley no sooner became aware of the vicinity of her enemy, than she abandoned the chase, shortened canvas, and prepared for action. She was a larger-class galley than our hero's, though, as it proved afterwards, but badly manned, and with a disaffected crew.

In something less than half an hour the Genoese struck to the Corsican, who had run her aboard at once; and the prize—one of Admiral Doria's finest galleys—turned out a rich one. Having been sent on a month's cruise, she had taken several valuable prizes, which, Paoli learned from some released captives, were all safely anchored in the port of Salonica, awaiting the return of the Genoese galley, who intended, after capturing the Venetian carrick, to return to that port, and then sail with her prizes, and rejoin the Genoese fleet. Not expecting to meet any Venetian galley of war in the Sea of Marmora at that time, she had left a third of her crew with the prizes. The Genoese galley was still superior in force to Paoli's; but his usual good fortune and gallantry carried the prize at a very trifling loss. She was commanded by the young Count Durazzo, and many of the volunteers were of the young nobility of Genoa, who offered considerable ransoms for their freedom, which Paoli most willingly agreed to on reaching Negropont.

But first he was resolved to cut out from the harbour of Salonica the prizes left there by the Count Durazzo. In order to carry his project into execution, he had recourse to a *ruse*. Having received the pledged word of each of the captains, according to the customs of the times, he sent them and their crew aboard his own galley, with a strong body of his men and two able officers to take charge; and, leaving them to shape their course for Negropont, he sailed with the Genoese galley for Salonica.

As soon as the gale subsided, and having arrived off the port, he signalled the four prizes—which he distinctly beheld riding within the pier—to weigh and join him. As he used the signals from the Genoese book of direction, not the slightest suspicion was excited. Salonica was a very strongly defended port; and, without a *ruse*, it would have been impossible to obtain possession of the prizes. But no sooner had the officers left in charge beheld the galley of the Count Durazzo, with its banner

waving over the poop, and read the signals, than they weighed and followed their consort, who, shaping his course for Lepanto, where the Genoese fleet were in winter quarters, led the unsus- picious officers of the Durazzo out of sight of Salonica, and then, to their great astonishment and consternation, they fell, one by one, into the snare laid for them. With his very valuable prizes, Paoli made his way to Negropont, where he found his own galley safely moored.

The Corsican, however, learned that Admiral Pisani was at Castello Tornese, one of the most magnificent and gigantic erections raised by the Venetians in their eastern settlements. The Marchese Di Loridano, who commanded in the absence of Pisani, received our hero with distinguished attention, and spoke in high terms of his gallantry and extreme good fortune ; for one of the prizes contained treasure to a large amount. The Marchese was of opinion that Paoli should proceed at once to Tornese, as the despatches were marked "Important," and for the admiral himself. Paoli was informed by the Marchese that the fleet would be ready before the winter expired, and that he had received information that Admiral Doria had already left his winter quarters, therefore it behoved him to keep a careful look-out in steering for Tornese.

The young Genoese nobility, taken in the galley of the Mar- chese Durazzo, were permitted to charter a neutral barque, having pledged their word not to engage in the then existing war between Genoa and Venice. The ransoms were settled to their mutual satisfaction ; for, notwithstanding the deep hatred Paoli so justly bore to Genoa, his natural generosity of disposition was not to be changed even by his bitter feeling against the destroyers of his native land.

Paoli then sailed for Tornese, but variable winds and calms, unusual for the time of year, retarded his progress, and several days were spent in reaching the island of Cerego. It was near sunset as the wind fell, leaving them about a league from Cape St. Angelo. The sun went down, giving to the sky a crimson hue, almost startling from its vividness, while dark masses of clouds rapidly showed their heads in the western horizon.

Paoli felt satisfied they would have to contend with a gale before morning ; and his pilot, an old and experienced navi- gator of those seas, was of the same opinion, and strongly advised their manning their long and ponderous sweeps, so as to gain a sufficient offing to clear the Cape before them, as the tempest—for tempest he knew it would be—would come from the south.

Paoli himself was inclined (hemmed in as they were by islands and shoals) to seek anchorage behind the island of

Cerego. Under her sweeps, double manned, the galley gathered way with her head for the island.

In the meantime our hero paced the deck, while his thoughts were far indeed from the scene around him, which soon became wrapped in impenetrable darkness.

Pulini, who followed the fortunes of Paoli with steady devotion, stood upon the deck, leaning against the mainmast of the galley, and gazing at the powerful form of his lord, seen in the faint light of the two lanterns hoisted over the poop. Pulini loved the island which had given him birth; and would rather have stretched himself on the hard rock of his native mountain by the side of his young lord, and struggled for Corsican liberty, even though he should perish in doing so, than follow him through the brilliant exploits he achieved under the banner of St. Mark. The faithful squire longed for some intelligence from Corsica. He was well aware that a thousand men were ready to start up and struggle again against their oppressors if the slightest change took place in the Genoese Government. Pulini also looked anxiously to the result of the contest between Genoa and Venice; for, should Venice succeed in annihilating the Genoese fleet, the resources of that Republic would receive a great shock.

A profound stillness reigned around, broken only by the fall of the ponderous sweeps; a long, low swell began to be felt; and the air, before cool, became sultry and oppressive. In the silence of the night, the fall of the swell against the iron-bound coast of Cerego fell distinctly upon the ear. Just then the pilot pointed out to his commander a small unsteady light resembling a star.

"That," said he "is the Faro of Cerego—a very lofty tower, built upon a sharp disjointed rock. We must not attempt that harbour, signor, if the gale burst upon us, as I fear it will. You see how quick the swell comes; the tempest is on the waters, though as yet we do not feel it. Hark!" continued he after a pause. He then shouted, "In oars—in oars—be quick!"

As he spoke there was a roar aloft unlike any other sound, and then the galley was struck by the furious blast, bending her beneath the instantaneously foaming sea, while a drift of ocean spray rushed over her deck like a cataract. The galley shook and quivered beneath the shock; and, before she could recover herself, or her crew could regain their control over her, a flash of blue quivering flame ran along her deck, and then burst at the foot of the foremast, bringing it, and its ponderous yard, a wreck over the side. The crash of thunder that followed this vivid and fatal flash or meteor—for four seamen were killed—astonished and bewildered the galley's

crew ; but Paoli, with his energetic officers and pilot, rouscd them into action, and, in a few seconds, they got the galley to scud before the blast.

Another peal of thunder, more appalling than the last, changed the direction of the tempest like magic. A kind of whirlwind fell upon the waters, driving them in all directions like snow-drift into the air. The heavens, at the same time, were one vast sheet of flame, disclosing to view the before calm sea—tossed and agitated by the war of the elements. In vain the labouring ship recovered from one shock—to be met by the capricious hurricane in an opposite direction.

At length, when fearfully near the western point of Cerego, the tempest seemed to settle into the south-west, and the thunder to roll away in the distance—away went the galley, like a scared sea-bird, her startled crew relieved by the change in the wind, which enabled them to avoid the rock-bound coast of Cerego ; when, in a vivid flash of lightning, the man on the look-out shouted,—

“A craft under our starboard bow !”

The next moment the galley struck some object with tremendous force, reeling and staggering with the shock. Giacinto Paoli was standing at the moment near the pilot, who, with another man, held the helm. The crash threw him against the bulwarks. The galley broaching to, a breaking sea filled her decks with a flood of water.

For a moment our hero believed the galley to be sinking ; but, regaining his feet, he called his bewildered officers and crew to their senses, and, after considerable exertion, the vessel was again got before the wind. Such was the fury of the storm, that not a sail could be set which was not torn into ribbons. Flash after flash lighted the ocean round ; but nought was to be seen except the crested tops of the breakers—nothing to be heard but the howling of the pitiless gale, as it raged through the rigging, and bent the vessel beneath the surge.

“I greatly fear,” said Paoli to a Venetian who acted in the capacity of what we should call a supercargo, but who, in reality, was a paid spy, “I fear we have run down some unfortunate barque.”

“If so, signor,” returned the man, “the people on board her have perished, as not a vestige of her can be seen.”

“There is no doubt,” observed the pilot, coming from an examination of the galley’s beak, “that we have run down some craft. Our bow is damaged a little, and some of the frame-work carried away. We had better, signor, run into the anchorage between Sapienza and Sphaeteria.”

This advice our young commander followed, and just sa

morning dawned they came to an anchor under Sapienza, in the port of Modon, a safe and commodious harbour, where, in a couple of days, he repaired his damages. But, when prepared to sail, a small fleet, consisting of four galleys, two or three brigantines, and a very large zebec, appeared off the islands ; and as the breeze still blew strongly from the south and west, the fleet came to an anchor under the island of Sphacteria. The zebec, however, kept under sail, lying-to off the entrance of the sound.

Giacinto easily made out that this fleet was a Genoese reinforcement for the fleet of Admiral Doria. Finding that they remained at anchor, he determined to attempt the passage through the sound during the night, resolving to give battle to the zebec if pursued. Accordingly, with a strong breeze in his favour, and a very dark night, he weighed anchor, and sailed from the port of Modon, without, as he thought, being perceived by the galleys, as they were invisible to him, and steered for the sound. But it seems the Genoese sailors had discovered that a large Venetian vessel lay in the port of Modon, which at the period of our story was strongly fortified, and in the hands of the Greeks ; for scarcely had the Lion attempted to pass between the flat rock and the island of Sapienza, than a stout cable, stretched by buoys across the gut, caught their bows ; and which, though it at once parted, was evidently fastened to one of the brigantines lying at anchor in the sound ; for instantaneously a bright crimson flame shot up into the air, and the moment after a clear blue flame was shown from the poops of all the four vessels, revealing every object around with a startling distinctness. Paoli cast a rapid and comprehensive glance around him : he perceived that the zebec was within bow-shot to leeward, and that two of the galleys—very large ones—were both to windward, and that they had at once slipped their cables, and were running down upon him. In this critical situation our hero was still undismayed : he could not return, if inclined, and beat back through the narrow passage ; but, knowing the swiftness of his own craft, and the spirit and energy of his crew, he did not at all despair of extricating himself from his critical position.

As the fires were continually kept up on board the enemy's vessels, he was able to judge pretty exactly their situation ; but the zebec, which seemed to sail remarkably fast, by catching the wind in a slant from the land, came right across his course. She appeared to be full of men, for when within half bow-shot, a shower of shafts and bolts from cross-bows and arbalets fell upon the Lion's deck ; but the men received no

injury, because of the obscurity and uncertainty of the aim. The zebec then thought to run the Lion aboard ; but just as the collision between the vessels appeared inevitable, and would have given time to the foremost galley to close with them, the Lion went rapidly about, and, having cleared the sound, bore away. But not in time to avoid the galley to windward. Grapnels, and all the instruments then used in ancient warfare, were cast aboard the Lion by the galley as she ran alongside, but were as instantly cast back ; and the breeze blowing very fresh, and the point of the island being cleared, the Lion stood away from her baffled enemies, though hotly pursued by the three galleys and the zebec.

Unfortunately, the mast shipped at Modon was much too slight for the ponderous latine yard carried by the Lion, but none stouter was to be had ; and the new rigging being slack, a heavy squall and the great sea outside the islands, where the gale still raged, carried away the Lion's foremast, yard and all, over the side.

This was a sad and not to be remedied disaster. The wreck was, however, cleared away, and the vessel, under her immense mainsail, sailed fast through the heavy and breaking seas. Towards morning the wind increased, but so well did the Lion sail, that she still kept ahead of her pursuers. As the day rose the islands of Sapienza were scarcely visible, while Zante and Cephalonia began to appear like little dark specks in the eastern horizon.

The largest of the Genoese vessels was, however, gaining on our hero, and to his surprise the zebec kept up with her. They were nearly within bow-shot, and he could see that the deck of the latter was crowded with soldiers destined for some of the colonies in the East.

Still it was not till within a few leagues of Zante that the galley and the zebec came up with their chase. The former was, however, at this period, considerably ahead of her comrade, and commenced the fight, as usual, with arrows, bolts, and stones thrown from engines. But Paoli (determined to make a desperate fight) suddenly ordered the helm to be put down ; and, carrying an immense press of after-sail, bore up in the wind. Striking the Genoese galley amid-ships with tremendous force, and taken immediately aback with an immense press of canvas, both her masts went over the sides ; by using his immense sweeps, and great exertion, our hero got the Lion again before the wind before the zebec could close. Thus he was able to prepare for his other enemy, crippled as he was, and not having his full complement of men aboard.

Just as the zebec appeared ready to run alongside the Lion,

a scene of great confusion seemed to prevail on board, in the midst of which Paoli luffed up, and with a chosen part of his crew, as the vessels closed, leaped aboard, battle-axe in hand. He was encountered by an officer in handsome armour, whom he felled to the deck ; and, gallantly assisted by his lieutenant, drove the astounded Genoese before him. With loud cries, the soldiers threw down their arms and demanded quarter, some of them, at the same time, pulling down the Genoese flag.

Their officers were furious ; but the men, who had mutinied twice before, as they were destined to garrison one of the most unhealthy settlements in the east, refused to strike another blow.

Having secured his prize, and received the arms of the officers in command, he bore down on the disabled galley, which, after a sharp, but short, hand-to-hand conflict, surrendered.

Taking her in tow, the Lion crowded all sail for Zante, the two other vessels being several miles to leeward. These were evidently very dull sailors ; for he was able to run into Zante, with his prize in tow, just as the leading galley came within bow-shot.

After arranging everything with respect to his prizes, which were extremely valuable, he at once set out for the then considered impregnable fortress of Castello Tornese, where Admiral Pisani then was.

The remains of this stupendous fortress still exist. It is built upon an eminence overlooking the vast plains of Gastorini. From the ramparts of this magnificent edifice the eye ranges over a vast expanse of sea, studded with those islands now known as the Ionian—Zante lying, as it were, beneath the walls ; while to the eastward the delighted gaze roams over a fairy scene as far as the beautiful gulf of Lepanto, while the mountains of Arcadia and Epirus bound a vast portion of this unrivalled amphitheatre.

Admiral Pisani received Paoli most courteously ; complimented him on his gallantry and great success ; made many inquiries concerning the state of the Greek vessels in Byzantium, and other matters.

At the expiration of three days, Paoli shipped a number of artizans and sailors, and to his great joy received orders to sail for Byzantium, with directions to the younger Pisani to expedite, as much as possible, the equipment of the emperor's contingent, as the admiral fully expected, before the winter expired, to meet the hostile fleet under Admiral Doria.

In parting, Admiral Pisani said, “ Signor Paoli, it has turned out fortunate, both for your renown and emolument, that my

nephew forwarded his despatches by you. But, in point of fact, they were not of sufficient importance to risk the capture of your noble galley, by running the gauntlet through the numerous cruisers the Genoese have in those seas at present. In the month of January I fully expect to be at anchor off the port of Byzantium."

Our hero again set sail, leaving his prizes under an officer of inspection appointed by the admiral ; and after several very narrow escapes from the cruizers of Genoa, who kept the seas the whole winter, and sinking a large Genoese caravel full of warlike stones proceeding to Caffa, he arrived safely in the port of Byzantium.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RIVAL LOVERS.

THERE was no mistaking the bright smile or the sparkling eyes of the fair Agnes as she met her lover after his return from his expedition. She had much to relate to her betrothed ; for, during his absence, events had taken place which disturbed her mind. Knowing, with all a woman's acuteness, the fiery and nasty temper of the Corsican, she somewhat hesitated ; till, strengthened in her resolution by the advice of her kind friend the Signora Tolmeo, she resolved to speak fully to her lover upon the subject that disturbed her ; first anxiously entreating Paoli to give her his promise that he would not resent the inconsiderate conduct of Giovanni Pisani, who, to do him justice, was not aware of the betrothment of Paoli and Agnes. Passionately attached to the maiden while a mere boy, he had sailed from Venice with the resolution of offering himself to the merchant's daughter. Her reception of the Corsican, which he had himself witnessed, rather startled him from his self-confidence ; for Pisani's chief failing was pride. Still, imagining that if Paoli was removed from the presence of Agnes he (Pisani) should have a chance of winning her love, he craftily sent his rival on an expedition, in which he felt almost certain the young commander would be captured by the numerous cruisers of Doria in the Archipelago.

After the departure of the Corsican, Pisani became more earnest in his manner ; and as his motive was soon evident to Agnes—for women are quick to perceive when the heart is concerned—she became more distant and reserved. Still the young Count was not to be repulsed : his pride would not allow him to think that a Corsican exile, with no other fortune than his sword, could be preferred to him, a Venetian, with a name

ennobled through centuries, possessing immense wealth, and having already distinguished himself in several brilliant actions.

But Agnes was not to be won by a handsome person, a noble name, or wealth. Her first romantic meeting with Paoli had certainly kindled the first spark of love in her breast. No doubt it would in time have been extinguished, had not the letters of her cousin Paulina fanned the spark. At length the arrival of the knight himself blew the weak light into a flame ; and a more intimate knowledge of his mind and disposition, added to an unrivalled figure and handsome features, increased the feeling that had so long fluttered in her gentle bosom.

Pisani offered himself and fortune to the merchant's daughter. Agnes kindly but firmly rejected his proposals ; but, with obstinate infatuation, the Venetian persisted, and then the maiden candidly declared her affection for, and engagement with, Paoli.

In the moment of disappointed passion, and giving way to a temper that too often overpowered a naturally generous disposition, Pisani upbraided Agnes with bestowing her love upon a Corsican adventurer, who was not only stigmatized as a rebel, but suffering under a State sentence of banishment.

"You have risked your happiness, lady," he added, in a bitter, exasperated tone, "upon a quicksand. The galleys of Genoa now sweep the eastern seas ; and this wandering knight may pass the remainder of his days in hopeless captivity."

Gentle and mild in disposition and temper, Agnes was still not without pride and spirit, both of which were roused by the unfeeling speech of the Venetian, who bitterly repented the utterance the moment after. She rose haughtily from her seat, casting a look of scorn upon the agitated and unhappy Pisani, saying, as her hand rested upon the door,—

"I am not surprised, signor ;" and the tone of her voice, cold and cutting, went to the heart of the Venetian. "To you, then, as I surmised, does the noble Paoli owe this dangerous voyage. Be satisfied ; his gratitude will equal the benefit conferred. We meet, Signor Pisani, for the last time beneath my father's roof. You have raised no fear within my breast for him whom my own heart and my father's wishes have chosen for my husband. Providence will protect him whom your false friendship has sought to betray."

Before the repentant Pisani could reply, the maiden was gone.

"She is gone !" muttered Pisani ; "and she thinks me a villain. Yes!"—and he bit his lip in passion—"Giovanni Pisani has earned the title. Curses on my weak brain and

false pride, which have brought this stain upon my hitherto fair name ! But I will see Agnes—I will implore her forgiveness ; and if the friend I have betrayed falls by the snare I, like a coward, laid for him, adieu to the world, for Giovanni Pisani scorns life coupled with dishonour ! ”

And, with a hurried step, he left the mansion of the Signor Alviano.

But in vain the Venetian sought permission to see the indignant maiden. Though her pride and spirit scorned to let Pisani see she trembled at the danger her lover ran in prosecuting his voyage, yet in secret she grieved, and thought over the probable disasters he might incur.

Such, excepting Pisani’s soliloquy, which she could not know, though we have communicated it to the reader, was the substance of what the merchant’s daughter communicated to Paoli on his return ; but the expressions and terms applied to him by Pisani she kept to herself.

As Agnes concluded and looked anxiously in her lover’s face, in which she saw no trace whatever of anger, a kiss was pressed upon her blooming cheek, which made the colour richer still.

“ Be assured, beloved Agnes,” said Paoli, “ I feel no resentment against my friend Pisani. Do you think, dearest, to lose such a treasure as this”— and his arm gently encircled the waist of the maiden—“ would not try even so noble a heart as Pisani’s ? It was but a *ruse d’amour* ; and it has, in the end, not only enriched me, but,” he added, gaily, “ crowned me with laurels. Not one word of reproach shall Pisani receive from me. Is it not triumph enough that the exile of Corsica—the banished of Venice—obtains what the noble and wealthy Pisani sued for in vain ? ”

That same evening Giacinto was seated in his cabin, arranging some papers and charts, and pointing out places to his lieutenant—an officer of the name of Loredani—to whom, for his gallantry and steadiness, he was getting much attached, when the Count Pisani entered the cabin—for the galley lay alongside the quay of the arsenal. Paoli rose to meet him. He had not seen him since his arrival, as Pisani was absent.

The Signor Loredani left the cabin as the Count entered.

Paoli, with a kindly greeting, held out his hand. The Venetian shook his head, saying,—

“ Mine is not worthy, Signor Paoli, to meet the palm of an honourable man. I have wronged you, Paoli,” he added, with bitterness ; “ and I come to offer the only reparation one man can give another—satisfaction at the sword’s point ”

“ Nay, Pisani,” replied the Corsican, with a smile, “ let us

keep our swords' points for the bodies of our enemies. Believe me, we should feel no pleasure in the encounter. We are all, in moments of passion, liable to err. You have done everything that is required of an honourable man. Give me your hand, Pisani. It's a noble hand—belongs to a noble heart. Let our friendship, from this time, be too firmly established to be again disturbed!"

"You are generous, Paoli, as well as noble," replied Pisani, as he pressed the hand so freely offered. "The day may come when Giovanni Pisani may wash out this blot upon his escutcheon."

In a short time the gay and high-spirited Corsican drove the gloom from the brow of the sensitive Venetian. He also promised to make his peace with Agnes. The rest of the evening was spent pleasantly enough by the reconciled friends.

On the following day, the Signor Alviano returned from Scutari, where he had spent the last week, closing accounts with some merchants resident there. He was rejoiced on seeing Paoli; for, though the merchant, to quell the anxiety of his daughter, had said there was little risk in Paoli's voyage, yet he felt, in private, considerable doubt with respect to its fortunate termination. He therefore received the Corsican with all the affection of a parent, and listened to his account of his adventures with interest and surprise.

"I have nearly closed all my mercantile transactions here," continued Alviano; "and with much satisfaction, after so many years' residence. If this plaguy war was terminated, I should be ready in less than two months to sail for Venice. This new law of the Venetian rulers will also put an end to the Marchese Tiepolo's mercantile transactions."

"How so, signor?" demanded Paoli.

"Why," replied Alviano, "it is now ordained, by a decree of the senate, that no Venetian nobleman shall embark in commercial pursuits."

"What a singular act of tyranny, father!" exclaimed Agnes. "What on earth could be the cause of such an arbitrary decree?"

"Ha! ha!" laughed the merchant, patting his daughter's cheek; "we must put a bridle upon your little tongue when we get to Venice. No one dares in Venice to couple the word tyranny with the rulers of the people."

"But what can be the meaning of this new decree?" questioned the Corsican.

"Its direct tendency," replied Alviano, "is, I suppose, to prevent the accumulation of wealth in new hands, and thus preserve the ascendancy of those families by whom power is

already obtained. The new laws regulating dress will, I feel certain, be very unpopular. Even the table and personal expenses of each rank of citizens is now to be under the inspection of three especial magistrates. The cloak of the richest noble, as well as of the meanest citizen, is henceforth to be made of Paduan cloth ; and a heavy penalty is imposed upon the use of English, Spanish, or Dutch manufactures. Another piece of news I have also heard," continued the merchant. "War is declared with Louis of Hungary ; and Zara has again revolted. So, you see, altogether, the rulers of Venice will have no easy task to guide the helm of state."

"Giovanni Gradinegro, the Doge who succeeded to the blood-stained throne of the ill-starred Faliero," said Paoli, "will not sit upon a bed of roses, with all these misfortunes crowding upon him. At all events, I heartily wish the coming winter over. The inactivity and delay in the contest that must take place between the rival fleets is wearisome."

"*Per Bacco !* my son," remarked the merchant, with a smile, "you cannot complain of being inactive. By Jove ! during this last voyage, your prizes have more than cleared all the expenses of the outfit and building of the Lion. What amount did you fix for the ransom of the Count Durazzo, and the five other nobles ? "

"I left the amount to the Count himself," replied Paoli ; "and I consider the sum offered—two hundred thousand livres of Genoa—a very liberal amount for the Count and his fellow-captives."

"You would make but a poor merchant in the way of barter, my son," observed the merchant, smiling. "What sum, do you think, did Doria demand—ay, and obtain—for the Marchese de Contarini and the Count Delfino, taken with three hundred prisoners of no note, to judge by the amount demanded ? One hundred thousand scudi of Genoa for each of the nobles, and five thousand livres of Genoa for the three hundred commoners. The Count Durazzo, your prisoner, is the only son of the great Marchese Durazzo, the wealthiest noble in the state of Genoa. Why, my dear hoy, you ought to have demanded the price of the fifty Corsican towns and villages sacked, burned, and destroyed, when his father commanded the forces of Genoa, in their descent upon Corsica, about the period of your birth. He was finally, however, driven from the island by the gallantry and heroic exertions of your lamented father."

Paoli looked at the kindling eye of the worthy merchant, who spoke in a tone of energy unusual to him.

"You surprise me, my dear sir," said Paoli. "Your in-

terest in, and knowledge of, the events that have taken place in my beloved but unfortunate country, has struck me forcibly before now—”

“ Nothing surprising,” returned the merchant, smiling, “ in my being interested in the country of my beloved child’s future husband. And as to my knowledge of events, your squire Pulini would chatter for hours over the wrongs of Corsica. But come with me: if I leave you so much with my little girl, she will make you work, as Hercules did of old, at a distaff.”

“ No fear of that, father,” replied Agnes, laughing. “ I assure you, even now, he is longing to try his favourite Lion against the wooden bulwarks of Genoa. Is it not so, Giacinto ? ”

“ Even so, sweet Agnes. But why ? This contest ended, this little hand, you know, becomes mine.”

“ Ah ! ” ejaculated the maiden, and somehow she lost her playful manner, and the tone of her voice fell, “ I dread these next few months. I hate war and its horrors. Its pomps and its gorgeous outward show are but miserable masks to hide its deformities and the misery attending it. And I cannot divest my mind of a conviction,” added she, as the knight kissed the small fingers he held in his, “ that much is before us of bitter trial.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BANQUET AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

“ You must accompany me this evening,” said the Signor Alviano to Paoli, “ to a very superb banquet given by the wealthiest Greek merchant in Byzantium, in honour of his daughter’s marriage. You have seen little, since your arrival, of the domestic manners and customs of the Greeks; you will be surprised at the display of wealth and luxury you will witness.”

“ In truth,” returned the knight, “ I have seen little else, since my residence here, but a very lazy and inactive population amongst the Greeks. In Venice they would have fitted out twenty galleys in the time they have consumed in getting those eight ready.”

“ True, true; they are proverbially slow; but I trust they will fight, nevertheless, with their ancient valour.”

At the appointed hour the merchant and his future son-in-law proceeded to the mansion of Alexis Catoga. About one hundred Greeks, of the first families in the city, sat down to a sumptuous and luxurious banquet, besides many Venetian and

Italian residents. Next to Paoli sat a young Greek, Constantine Natho, one of the officers of the emperor's galleys, who had spent much of his time in Italy. The Corsican passed a very pleasant hour or two in listening to his account of his travels, and also to some amusing anecdotes of his countrymen.

It was getting very late. The Signor Alviano had departed some time, and Paoli, feeling the heat excessive, and the guests getting somewhat boisterous, watched his opportunity, and quietly slipped from the saloon. He felt relieved as the keen night-air fanned his cheek. It was extremely dark; and the streets, as he gained some distance from the noisy mansion of the Greek merchant, were silent, and wholly deserted. Not in the least acquainted with the locality he was in—for the narrow streets of the city were crooked and puzzling, even to a native—Paoli paused before a small shrine of a Greek saint, lighted by a miserable taper, which flung its feeble rays a few feet across the street.

While he stood irresolute and gazing through the gloom, in hopes of seeing some straggler or object familiar to him, a short figure, closely enveloped in a mantle with a deep hood, suddenly appeared at his side, touching his arm. Paoli looked round surprised, and was about to question the figure as to his whereabouts, when it spoke, and the tones were those of a woman, and an old one.

"Signor," said she, "will you follow me to where good fortune awaits you?"

The words were spoken in *lingua-franco*.

Giacinto replied, laughing,—

"I will willingly follow you, my good dame; but the only good fortune I require is to find my way to the arsenal gate. Show me, or put me in the direct road, and here is a reward for your services," offering some small coins.

"I can lead you, signor, to the feet of the fairest woman in Byzantium," said the old crone, in a sharp voice. "Will you follow me?"

"No, dame," replied the Corsican, laughing; "the hour is late. Here, take these paras, and show me the way to the gate."

"And are you a man," asked the figure, in a mocking tone, "to refuse the invitation of the beautiful Kousani when she selects you for a lover? There are a hundred in Byzantium who would stake a thousand zecchines for such an invitation."

"Kousani!" replied Paoli, surprised, for he remembered that the young Greek Constantine had mentioned the name, and

spoke of her extraordinary beauty. He said she was the only daughter of the wealthiest Jew in the Greek empire. "No, my worthy dame," replied the Corsican, impatiently, and moving onwards, "since you refuse to point out my way, I must even find it myself."

The old woman turned away muttering some kind of execration, in a language the knight did not understand. But the next moment a loud shriek caused him to turn round, when, to his surprise, the old crone lay upon the ground, just beneath the shrine, and, striding over her, stood the figure of a man striking at her with right good will.

Indignant at such gross usage to a female, though none of the most amiable, the Corsican turned to chastise the fellow, but he no sooner approached than the man darted off with singular alacrity. The old crone groaned miserably, and vowed every bone in her miserable body was broken by her villainous husband, though she deserved it for her wickedness. At the same time she implored the Corsican, as a good Christian, to help her upon her legs. This was easily done; but she then uttered fresh cries of pain.

"Only help me, signor, as far as the end of this street. I have a relative lives there, and I will get you a guide to show you the way to the place you want."

The Corsican good-naturedly assisted the moaning creature to a lofty, and apparently dilapidated mansion, at the door of which she sank down, groaning more than ever.

"Push open the door, stranger," said she, "for the love of the blessed Prophet—Virgin, I mean."

Scarcely heeding the words, and anxious to get rid of his very disagreeable charge, the knight pushed open a very heavy door. All was still and intensely dark within. Advancing a step or two, he shouted aloud, when suddenly the door, through which he entered, slammed to with a loud noise, while, at the same moment, the spot on which he stood gave way, and precipitated him, with stunning violence, into a vault beneath. Before he could even make an attempt to rise, the light of a torch flashed through the vault, and at once four powerful blacks threw themselves upon him, prostrate as he was, and dizzy with a violent blow on the head received from falling. Paoli, even with his vast strength, could offer but a fruitless resistance to four strong men, armed with long daggers.

After a fierce struggle, his arms were bound so strongly with cords as to cause acute pain. Not a word was spoken. Lifting him on his legs, the blacks motioned him to follow them. Though they uttered not a word, they placed their poniards

close to his breast, and with violent gestures threatened him with death if he refused to obey. The Corsican felt his blood boiling, and his temples throbbing with intense rage ; he nevertheless moved after the blacks.

Quitting the vault, they ascended a long flight of stone steps—through a strong trap door they emerged into a long dismal passage. One of the blacks then opened a door of immense thick planks, while the other three pushed the Corsican within, and, shutting the door, the enraged knight heard the massive bolts shoot into their sockets. Thus he remained in utter darkness, with his hands bound behind him in the most painful manner.

Groping with his feet, he ascertained that the chamber was of very small dimensions ; he stumbled over a bench, which was the sole furniture it contained. A bundle of straw occupied one corner, upon which he, after a vain and painful struggle to free his hands, threw himself, to ponder over the strange and dangerous situation into which he had been entrapped. He could by no means clearly understand the motive of his seizure. That the vile old crone had ensnared him he felt satisfied ; and, on recalling his recollection, he remembered having heard that a daring and lawless gang of desperadoes infested the city, and, in the miserable state of the empire, committed many outrages. So craftily planned were their operations, that hitherto they had escaped detection.

If the gang that now detained him prisoner were partners of those desperadoes, no doubt their object was ransom. During the Crusades, large sums had been extorted from several of the Crusaders captured in that way. Sometimes, when no money could be obtained for their release, they were secretly got on board ship, carried to Gallipoli or Adrianople, and sold as slaves.

This thought for an instant made the Corsican shudder ; but, with an effort, his high spirit shook off the feeling of despair that was creeping over him. He then thought of the anxiety of his beloved Agnes when his most unaccountable disappearance should become known. He was, however, disturbed in his thoughts by hearing the bolts drawn back and the door open, when the same four blacks and the detestable old crone who had betrayed him entered. The woman was now without mantle or hood, and, looking at her, he beheld one of the fiercest and most forbidding hags he had ever the misfortune to encounter.

“ So, dog of a giaour ! ” yelled the wretch, as she advanced towards him, holding a brass lamp in one hand and a brazen

pitcher in the other, "so beauty had no charms for you ? The lovely Kousani was rejected. Ha ! ha !" And her croaking voice in laughing sounded horribly in the ears of the Corsican, who looked upon the old wretch with loathing.

One of the blacks carried a bundle of coarse garments, which the crone, who seemed to have the authority of a mistress, said were to be put on instead of those he wore.

"Hear me, woman," exclaimed Paoli, conquering his disgust, "if your object is to extort money there is no further need of ill-treatment. Name what sum you demand, and, if within my power, you shall have it. But detain me in this state twenty-four hours longer, if you tear my body in pieces, not one para shall you ever receive."

"You are a fool, Christian," interrupted the woman, in a mocking tone. "Half the amount of your capture is paid ; and when we deliver up your carcase, be it dead or alive, to him that has paid for it, we get the remainder. So strip. Your body will be bound by a strong chain to the wall to keep you out of mischief. He told us to take care of your claws, as you were a rough one to handle. Ha ! ha ! ha ! It's droll, though, how an old hag mastered you, strong as you are."

Completely astounded, Paoli stood looking from the old wretch to the four statue-like figures of the blacks.

"This, then," thought he, "is the premeditated act of an enemy—but who ?"

Not for one instant did the thought of Pisani, as the perpetrator of the outrage, enter his mind.

While he stood bewildered in fruitless conjecture, a footstep sounded in the passage ; and, the moment after, a tall, strong man, habited in the garb of a Greek sailor, entered, carrying a massive chain, fastened to an iron clasp, intended for the waist. This man was neither a Moor nor a Turk : his features were good, but swarthy, and somewhat fierce in expression. Thick black brows and beard added to the sternness of his look. He cast a glance upon Paoli, and then, in a language unknown to him, spoke to the old woman.

After a few words had passed between them, he turned to the Corsican, speaking in pure Italian.

"Your hands shall be unbound provided you give your word—your knightly word—such, I believe, is the custom with you knights—to quietly take off your upper garments and put on these," pointing to some at his feet. "If you refuse, your legs shall be bound, yourself gagged, and the clothes cut from your back."

Had his hands been free, Paoli would not have hesitated,

though death should follow the attempt, to attack the whole gang, unarmed as he was. Again he offered any ransom for his liberty, and a solemn oath to take no steps to revenge the outrage committed upon him.

"It is quite in vain," calmly returned the man, "your making offers to us. We have sworn to deliver you, dead or alive, to him that employs us ; and were you to place the ransom of a king in our hands, it would avail you nothing. Give me your promise—your oath on the faith of a knight—or an oath on this," and he pulled an ivory crucifix from his vest, "that you will neither offer resistance, nor make any attempt to escape during the next four days, and you shall be well treated and left without bonds or chains."

"Never, ruffian, never !" fiercely exclaimed Paoli, his passion worked up to madness at the cruel situation he had fallen into. "Do your worst. I pass no knightly word to such a villain."

A laugh of scorn was the answer of the man, as he made a sign ; when the four blacks instantly seized upon the Corsican, who, with a blow of his foot, sent the foremost negro reeling to the further end of the chamber. Then, with a prodigious force, he burst the cords round his wrists ; but, as he did so, the five men threw themselves upon him (exhausted with the effort) and bore him to the ground, amid curses and execrations from all, while the old fiend yelled,—

"Give him the knife !—give him the knife !—his dead carcase is worth as much as it is with life in it."

Held to the ground by five powerful men—for the four blacks were, in bone and muscle, nearly as strong as himself—Paoli was almost suffocated. His garments were torn from his back, and the coarse costume of a Scutari boatman was substituted in their place. The massive iron clasp was then fastened round his waist, and finally fixed, with two immense padlocks, to a huge eye-bolt in the wall. This being done, the man who spoke Italian spurned him with his foot.

The insult was dearly purchased, for before he could withdraw himself from the range of the Corsican's arm, a blow that would have felled an ox, planted between the eyes, laid the aggressor bleeding and senseless at the feet of the astounded blacks. A mad howl burst from the lips of the old crone as she snatched up a knife belonging to one of the negroes, and darted upon Paoli, shrieking with frantic rage,—

"You have killed our chief ! Curses on your hand !"

And, blind with rage, she struck with the knife at his face. Vicious and detestable as was the old wretch, the knight merely caught her hand in a grasp that rendered all her

members powerless but her tongue. Her wild cries brought another actor on the scene. A tall, well-looking female, evidently a Greek in features and dress, hastily entered the room, and cast a rapid glance upon all within. Her hair and eyes were jet black. The moment she beheld the still senseless figure of the man whom Paoli had struck, she started back with a cry of rage. But, kneeling down by his side, and wiping the blood from his face, and also perceiving he was regaining his senses, she said something to the blacks, who, raising the man in their arms, carried him from the chamber.

Turning to the Corsican, she addressed him in good Italian, saying,—

“Release the woman, and you will be no further molested this night ; and you,” taking the old hag by the arm, “come with me. Had you tried gentler means, all this might have been avoided, and our captive equally secure.”

Surprised at the gentle tone and moderate behaviour of this woman, whom Paoli, in his own mind, had set down as the wife of the man just carried from the room, he addressed her, imploring her to listen to his offers of liberal reward. In fact, he offered a sum that, but for some mysterious reason, must have satisfied the cupidity of any desperadoes, however greedy of gain.

The woman turned her dark, piercing eyes upon the knight for a moment without replying. At length she said,—

“No sum from you could purchase your freedom. We are sworn ; and, strange as you may think it, from our conduct to you, we should never dream of breaking that oath. Dead or alive, you go to him that has bought you.”

Taking the old and scowling hag by the arm, and lifting the lamp from the floor, she and her accomplices left the chamber, firmly bolting and barring the ponderous door after them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CONFEDERATES.

THAT branch of the Sea of Marmora which forms the port of Byzantium, and divides the Genoese settlement of Pera and Galata from the city, runs for six miles in a serpentine figure, and is distinguished by the name of the Golden Horn ; on the Genoese side of which the fortifications were of amazing strength ; several castles and fortresses, almost impregnable in that age, when gunpowder was scarcely known, reared their walls and lofty towers, frowning defiance upon the city opposite.

The Emperor Cantacuzenus, who then sat upon the Greek throne, beheld those imposing erections of the Genoese with alarm ; for so contemptible had become the power of the Greeks, that the handful of Genoese forming the garrisons of the Castles of Pera and Galata cared little how they insulted the inhabitants of the city.

We must now beg our readers to accompany us, on the second night after the capture of Giacinto Paoli, into a chamber of the strong fortress of Galata. This tower was under the command of a Genoese captain, with a force of sixty or seventy men. The tower was built close to the waters of the Golden Horn, and directly facing the point on which now stands the Seraglio. The chamber above mentioned was a large circular one. Hung round its walls were arms and armour of various sorts. It was then the month of December, and a cold and bitter gale was blowing from the north-east. Seated before a blazing wood fire sat two individuals, both in the prime of life, but otherwise very different in form and feature. The first to be described is the commander of the Tower of Galata, Andrea Campaldino.

His father, Mastino Campaldino, was a Genoese of low birth ; but, living in adventurous and perilous times, and being gifted with a strong frame, great courage, and skill, he fought his way upwards with steady perseverance ; and, at the commencement of this tale, commanded the forces of Genoa in her invasion of Corsica. His son, Andrea, held a command under his father, and exceeded his sire in the ferocious acts of cruelty he perpetrated upon the unhappy islanders. As already related, Mastino Campaldino fell by the hand of Paoli ; and Andrea, in defending his sire, received from the same sword a wound, the consequences of which embittered his after-life, and exasperated him tenfold against the slayer of his father.

Andrea Campaldino was vain to excess of a very fine person and exceedingly handsome features, which were irrevocably spoiled by the sword of Paoli ; for the blow not only left a deep and unsightly scar across the left temple and cheek, but the sight of the left eye was lost for ever.

Burning with an eager desire of vengeance against Paoli, not only did he offer a large sum for his capture, but numerous assassins, brought over from Genoa by his father, were let loose in his track. Paoli, however, baffled all the attempts upon his life, and escaped to the Continent, while Andrea, still suffering from the effects of his wound, threw up his command, and returned to Genoa ; and, as soon as his health was restored, joined a body of adventurers in an expedition against the island of Capraja, which was repulsed. Some time after he

sailed with a Genoese fleet for the shores of the Bosphorus ; and there he obtained the command of the Tower of Galata.

When the war broke out between Venice and Genoa, Campaldino employed a fast-sailing zebec in cruising along the shores of the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmora ; and her commander, not being very particular as to the vessels he attacked, provided he considered the capture certain, amassed a considerable store of plunder.

Returning from a cruise in the Propontis, the captain of his zebec beheld the contest between our hero's galley and the Genoese vessel commanded by the Count Durazzo, and shortly after learned that the Venetian galley was commanded by a Corsican of the name of Paoli. This man knew nothing whatever of Paoli or his country ; he had made the inquiries because he wished to shun any future encounter with the Lion, for he had very narrowly escaped being seen by her while plundering an Italian barque whose flag was under the protection of Venice.

On returning to Galata, he mentioned the escape he had had to Andrea Campaldino, stating how dangerous it was to attempt any further depredations in the Sea of Marmora, while so fine a galley as that commanded by Paoli was cruising in those seas.

“Commanded by whom ?” exclaimed Campaldino, with a start of astonishment. “What name did you say ?”

“Paoli, a Corsican, I understand, in the service of Venice.”

Campaldino was amazed. Could it be the same ? All the evil passions of his nature were roused with tenfold violence. The captain of his zebec was an Italian by birth. Various crimes of no light nature forced him to fly his country, and, having been taken by a Tunisian rover, he had spent six years chained to the oar. At length, carried to Adrianople, he there became a Mahometan, and would have prospered by that act of infamy, but, having murdered a Turk in a frenzy of passion, he fled, and, after a variety of adventures, reached Byzantium, where he very soon became connected with one of the most daring gangs of desperadoes and kidnappers that ever infested that city.

When the great pestilence swept over Europe, Byzantium suffered to an enormous amount. Three parts of her population were carried off in one particular part of the city, and, for years after, the houses were left to fall into ruin and decay. Many fell, and others were without roofs. The place was termed the plague-ground, and shunned universally, for it bore an evil name besides.

Amid these deserted habitations the above-mentioned gang

—composed of outcasts and villains of all nations—had several hiding places, either for concealing their victims, or stowing their plunder. The leader of this gang was killed in a night encounter ; and Paulo Montoni, the name of Campaldino's captain, married his widow, and shortly after was elected their leader.

In making a voyage to Adrianople, with a number of unfortunate captives, kidnapped at various times, their barque, being suspected of piracy, was chased by a Genoese galley. To be taken with a hold full of chained Christians would be certain destruction. It was blowing hard, and the sea rough. Paulo Montoni and his crew scuttled the barque, and thought to escape in the boat. The ill-starred captives sank with the vessel before their pursuers could reach her ; but Montoni and his comrades found their boat would not live to reach the shore in the violent gale, which kept each instant increasing ; and had not the galley picked them up, they must have perished.

Though not aware of the nature of their cargo, the Genoese commander, nevertheless, thought they were pirates of some sort or other ; and, with very little examination, condemned them to the labour of the oar. On board this galley was Andrea Campaldino, who examined the men saved ; and, struck with the daring and reckless manner of Paulo, he felt satisfied, in his own mind, that he was a man who would suit him in some views he had. When he obtained the command of the Tower of Galata, he recollects this man, made inquiries, and found he was working upon the ramparts of Pera. Having sought him out, he had a conversation with him, and promised to procure him his liberty if he would take a solemn oath to serve him in whatever he required.

Paulo Montoni, accordingly, swore the most fearful oaths, that, if he could liberate him, he would sacrifice life in his service, and that he might keep him near him without fear, as he had the power of so disguising his person as to defy detection.

“No occasion for that,” observed Campaldino, “you shall be at liberty to-morrow—I will purchase your freedom from your master, who is under certain obligations to me.”

He kept his word ; and Paulo Montoni entered the service of Campaldino, who made him captain of a zebec he had fitted out at his own expense. Montoni soon understood his master ; and very shortly after informed him he was leader of a gang of desperadoes who actually lived with impunity within the walls of Byzantium. The confederates then made a mutual compact. Campaldino intended, when he should have amassed sufficient plunder, to throw up his command and return to Genoa.

Paulo, besides cruising now and then, entered Byzantium, and, to the astonishment of his wife, who was on the very point of marrying the new leader appointed—for Montoni and his comrades were considered to have perished—made his appearance amid the very party assembled to celebrate the wedding of their elected chief (a worthy Moor), who, however, gave up the lady ; and Montoni, not to be outdone in politeness, resigned the command, saying, it was all for the better, as he required to be absent at times for a considerable period.

Campaldino set Montoni to make inquiries concerning Paoli in Byzantium, and he very soon learned that the Paoli who commanded the Venetian galley was the identical Paoli who had deprived him (Campaldino) of the sight of his left eye.

“Montoni,” said the Genoese, “you must entrap that Corsican on his return to Byzantium. Bring him hither alive, if possible.”

“I will engage to entrap him,” returned Montoni, “and keep him secure enough in a vault from which it is impossible he should escape. But to bring him here now that the harbour is so strictly guarded will be difficult. It is, however, to be done.”

“Shave his head, and dye his skin,” suggested Campaldino with a grin of malice. “Put on him the garment of a galley slave ; and, disguising yourself and a few more, pass him off as a runaway from the galleys in Scutari. Mark me : he is one of the most powerful men you have ever encountered. He is, however, daring to recklessness. Gag him, by all means.”

“Your plan is a good one,” replied Montoni. “As to his strength, have no fear. We have four blacks, each a Hercules.”

After some further conversation, Montoni crossed over to Scutari. Thence, in disguise of a Greek mariner, he entered Byzantium ; and, after waiting for the return of Paoli, laid his plans to entrap him. They all failed till the night of the banquet at the Greek merchant’s, when Paoli so unfortunately fell into his power.

After this digression, which was unavoidable, we return to the circular chamber in the tower of Galata.

CHAPTER XIX.

ANDREA CAMPALDINO.

THE two individuals seated before a blazing fire in the tower of Galata were Andrea Campaldino and his lieutenant, Achilles Furiani. The commander of Galata was at this period about

eight-and-twenty. He was of the middle height, and somewhat slender, yet muscular and well made. To look on one side of his face only, the beholder would pronounce the Genoese to be a very handsome man, but, viewing him full in the face, the livid scar across the temple and cheek, and the extinction of the left eye, gave him a most forbidding and sinister expression of countenance.

In contrast to his commander, his lieutenant, Achilles, was a man of big bones and powerful muscles, of immense bulk and stature, but without a particle of grace or activity in his air or manner ; yet his features bore a general expression of careless good-nature. In fact, Achilles cared but for three things in this world, namely, good eating, considerable drinking, and a little fighting—perhaps the latter was taken for exercise, or to help digestion. Furiani was in all his patron's secrets ; for he was a complete adventurer. Being too lazy to do anything for himself, he was quite willing to act in any manner which Andrea might desire, whether for good or evil. Had his master been a good man Achilles would have followed his example, provided he had been sufficiently supplied with food and drink. But Campaldino was a villain ; and, consequently, Furiani was in the right way of becoming one also.

The two worthies sat at each side of the fire. A table, covered with substantial edibles and numerous flasks, graced the apartment.

"It blows hard, Achilles," said Campaldino, stretching his legs towards the cheerful blaze.

"Very," replied the lieutenant, filling the huge goblet with some of the famous wine of Cyprus. "How very comfortable the old tower is in this cursed biting wind," he added, after getting to the bottom of a goblet that would have satisfied any moderate man for the evening.

"Yes," returned Campaldino, looking at the empty goblet, "and how deuced fortunate it was that Montoni transferred those hogsheads of Cyprus wine, intended for the use of the Greek admiral, into our keeping, or, *per Bacco!* that capacious stomach of thine would ere this have caused a drought in the tower of Galata."

"A most useful rascal is that Paulo," observed Achilles, "if he does not play you false some of these days."

"I have no fear in the world of him," returned Campaldino, selecting a flask or two of the Cyprus for himself—for Furiani required to replenish his goblet after every sentence—"he is late to-night ; he promised faithfully to be here two hours ago. I somehow begin to fear that Corsican will slip through his fingers, with all his acuteness."

"I only wish I had my hand on him," said the lieutenant, holding out a hand that, for vastness of palm and immense length of fingers, was scarcely to be surpassed even by a giant.

Campaldino smiled grimly and curled his lip, as his eye rested upon the inactive mass before him.

"If you had, my worthy friend," returned the commander of Galata, "you would wish it off again; for, upon my soul, he would think as little of your fat carcase as you do of that empty flask you have just drained!"

"The devil he would!" retorted Achilles, in no way offended; "is he a giant? or is he a magician? or does he deal in the evil eye, like those cursed Greeks? for, *per Bacco!* I do not count myself a chicken."

"No, not in eating and drinking, my worthy Achilles, nor, indeed, in the matter of fighting either; still, I tell you, that cursed Corsican would drill a hole through your capacious stomach that would effectually prevent your swilling Cyprus as you do, and in less time than you empty a flask. He is neither a magician nor an evil eye, nor, as far as weight goes, as heavy a carcase as you. He stands nearly as high; but his strength is surprising, his activity great, and, from what I myself have witnessed——"

"And felt, too," interrupted Furiani.

"You are right, curse him!" fiercely continued Campaldino, passing his hand across his brow. "And he shall yet feel me! but rouse yourself, Achilles. Go as far as the water-gate—see if the light is in the right place—there is no trusting that thick-headed knave on guard to-night. Montoni is late; but, if the light is kept clear and distinct, he will cross to-night, notwithstanding this strong wind."

"Well, I would rather he should——"

"Hark!" interrupted Campaldino. "Some one ascends the stairs."

The next moment the door opened, and Paulo Montoni entered the chamber. The commander and his lieutenant started, and stared with astonishment at the Italian, who advanced into the room, and, filling a goblet—for it appears there was no kind of ceremony amongst the confederates—said,—

"By the mass! captain, but this stuff is far better lining for a man's inside than that confounded east wind which howls without like a famished wolf."

"You are not far wrong, Paulo, my fine fellow," remarked Achilles; "but who the devil has broken the bridge of your nose, and turned that grey eye of yours into as pretty a specimen of a black one as you would meet in a day's ride?"

"The same hand, by the mass!" returned Montoni, with a careless laugh, "as spoiled our commander's beauty."

"Have you, then, bungled the job, after all?" bitterly demanded Campaldino, "and got a broken nose and the side of your face mangled as a token of remembrance? I told you to take care, and warned you that he hits hard."

"*Corpo di Bacco!*" laughed Achilles, as he filled his own goblet and the Italian's, "it's droll: that d----d Corsican seems to have a fancy for blinding a man. How did it happen, eh?"

"Well, if you will just give a man time to get this east wind out of his stomach,"—and he drew his chair near to the fire, while Campaldino gazed sulkily into the glowing embers,—"I will tell you all about it. A broken nose and a damaged optic I certainly have got; but, as I never was remarkable for beauty, it matters little—especially as I have a wife who's not particular as to looks, seeing she was going to marry a black when she thought I had slipped my cable. Come, captain, rouse; don't look cast down—I charge nothing for the broken nose—for, by the Pope's head, I have got the game safe and sound!"

"Ha! the devil you have!" exclaimed Campaldino, springing on his feet. "Why the devil did you not out with it at once, and not be bandying jokes with that eternal wine-swiller there!"

"Fore Gad, you neither of you gave me time," returned the Italian; "and, besides, there is nothing lost by the delay."

"You are sure you have him safe?—no chance of escape, eh?" demanded Andrea.

"Not unless he walks away with two hundred weight of iron, and eats the four blacks that are watching him like hyænas; to say nothing of some half dozen of the crew of the zebec, who could lend a helping hand, if wanting."

"Well, by St. Antonio, you have managed it admirably!" exclaimed Andrea, tossing off a full goblet, and then drawing his breath as if relieved from some heavy oppression. "But how did you manage?—you scarcely ventured to use force in the streets of Byzantium?"

"No," returned Montoni; "that would have been madness with such a man as this Corsican; besides, we had no chance. Since his return, his only walk was from the arsenal to the mansion of one of the wealthiest Venetian merchants in Byzantium, named Alviano. By-the-bye, that puts me in mind of a plot that was hatching amid the gang at the very period of my arrival—I mean the time when I caught my wife on the point of marrying their present black leader. This plot was

to set fire to the mansion of that very merchant. His stores are beneath the house, and are full of immensely rich goods, which he is on the point of shipping for Venice. But, *Corpo di Bacco!* somehow, I couldn't stomach that. There's a lovely girl there—the merchant's daughter—and several females, and to run the risk of burning them, for the sake of plunder, was rather too bad."

"Curse them!" muttered Achilles, actually stopping in the middle of his draught, "they must be a precious set of hell-hounds, these comrades of thine, eh, Montoni?"

"I am rejoiced, Paulo," said the commander of Galata; and he fixed his one eye in a very expressive glance upon the undimmed optic of the Italian, "to see you study as well as practise humanity. I wonder how the devil you brought yourself to scuttle your craft, when we gave you chase, and thus send forty or fifty unshrive Christians into the other world."

"Ah! my worthy commander, that was an act of grace as well as self-preservation. You see they would have been sold as slaves—a much worse fate—if you had not singled us out. Then, if you had taken us, and found these unfortunates aboard, you would have hanged us without mercy. Besides, there were no females in the case—my heart is remarkably soft when there's a petticoat in the wind. But somehow, to-night, you are both in the humour for digressions. I shall never get to say all I have to say, and be in time to cross before daylight."

"Well, Paulo, make sail then," said Achilles. "The night is wearing out; and so, by the immortal gods, is this Cyprus wine! You are a thirsty dog, Montoni!"

The Italian laughed, and continued his narration.

"I said this Corsican only went from the arsenal to the merchant's house. By St. Anthony! I don't wonder at his sticking to that beat; for the girl is worth twenty thousand piastres. Well, I began to despair. In the dress of a Greek sailor I can walk the streets of the city with impunity. I often passed the knight, and, by the mass! a finer-looking fellow no man ever saw. At night he returned to the arsenal; but to attack such a man with a sword by his side, and a stout able-bodied squire walking after him, in the most frequented streets of the whole city, would be madness. I showed him one day to our decoy-duck—an old fiend in the shape of a woman, the mother of my wife. I beg your pardon, Signor Furiani, just share that flask—I see it's the last."

"Confound you! Go on, man," pettishly exclaimed Camaldino. "You have both drunk enough to muddle a dozen."

“Keep your temper, noble *capitano*, fortune smiles on you, as it did on me. This Paoli attended a feast, and, as luck would have it, he left the banquet alone. Our decoy and two of the gang were lurking near. They saw him entangle himself in the streets, and quickly concerted a plan to get him to enter a house they have on the place called the plague-ground, which is fitted up with a trap-door at the entrance. The old woman tried to get him to follow her to a rendezvous with the beautiful Jewess, Kousani, with the intention of persuading him that she was in love with him; but our friend, not being amorously inclined, or else too much in love with the merchant's daughter, only laughed at her. But, by the mass! the old woman was too much for him. She pretended her husband was beating her—the Corsican helped her up. She implored him to assist her to the house of a friend—he did so, and entered the door to call this friend, when down he went through the trap, striking his head against the side, or, by St. Antonio! there would have been a broken skull among my black tigers. As it is, he has lamed one of them for a month with a kick. I was so enraged that I gave him a push with my foot, and, *Corpo di Bacco!* he felled me to the earth with a blow between the eyes, depriving me of my senses for an hour or so, and effectually spoiling the beauty of my nose, as you very justly observe. But the question now is, how am I to get him across the harbour? His disappearance has caused the utmost consternation. An order has been issued by command of the emperor, for the most diligent search to be made through every house suspected; a body of the Venetian sailors are nightly guarding the gates; nothing passes without inspection; and large sums are offered by the Venetian merchant, Alviano, for any kind of information respecting the disappearance of the Corsican. Twice we had to fear an inspection of our hiding places; but, even had the searchers entered, my spies would have given us sufficient time to place our prisoner in the secret vaults.”

“And why the devil,” exclaimed Campaldino, “did you not place him there at first, and keep him there? Why run any risk whatever? Surely you do not fear his health,” he added, with a mocking laugh.

“Well, by the mass! captain, you are hard. Why, four-and-twenty hours down in those vaults, this season of the year, would kill a dog. The waters are now up, and the whole of the secret vaults are at this moment two feet deep in water. The passages out into the waters of the port are completely blocked: one or two of them would do on a pinch: that is, we might hide in them during search—but

the devil himself wouldn't be able to pass a couple of days there."

"What, then, do you propose to do?" demanded Campaldino. "I know nothing of the localities, and can devise no plan."

"Why, you see, captain," replied the Italian, "he is an extremely ugly customer to have the care of. He is utterly reckless of life; and I feel satisfied, if only one moment at liberty, would attack us all, and brain some of us before we could either secure or cut him down. Now, my plan is this:—one of our gang is a Greek who keeps a kind of shop in the bazaar—he is our chief spy, and his shop only a sham. Now this fellow is from Scutari, and a huge big brute he is. He must die."

"Eh?—what the devil!" exclaimed Achilles, opening his eyes, which were beginning to close from repeated application to the Cyprus wine. "You don't mean to say you will murder your own comrade in order to—"

"Tut, tut, Signor Achilles," interrupted the Italian, laughing boisterously, "what a chicken heart you have in that huge carcase of yours! But rest contented: we do not murder our comrades. This Greek must only get sick; and we shall give it out he is dead, and, of course, his friends will bury him in his native place, Scutari. A dose of opium will render our friend the Corsican a quiescent subject for a few hours. We will then enclose him in a coffin, procure a pass, and embark the body for Scutari. A well-manned galley from your side can meet us half way. The rest I need not detain you in relating. It's very late. What think you of my plan? for I must be off. All I can tell you is, it will be impossible to keep him in Byzantium a week longer; for that d——d squire of his is more to be dreaded than the Greek emperor or his entire guards."

"There is risk, and great risk, too," said Campaldino, after a pause. Then, rising, he took the Italian by the arm, and led him from the chamber unnoticed by Achilles, who gave audible tokens that the Cyprus wine had left him in a happy state of forgetfulness.

Campaldino, as he parted with Montoni, said, speaking low and distinctly,—

"You have sworn to obey me—no matter what I required of you. Now heed me. Should the slightest chance occur to enable your prisoner to escape, slay him. You understand me?"

"Perfectly, *capitano*, perfectly; and it shall be done."

"And more," resumed the commander, "let him know, at the time, that Andrea Campaldino, son of that Mastino Campaldino whom he slew, is the striker."

“*Benissimo!*” said the Italian. “That is, I suppose, to console him on his passage to eternity.”

Campaldino returned to his chamber, while the Italian pursued his way, muttering to himself,—

“I’ll do it. It’s a much easier plan. My worthy captain will be quite satisfied ; and thus a few inches of cold steel will save a world of trouble. St. Antonio ! it will be an act of grace. In the power of my worthy commander, the rest of his days would be passed in a dungeon, or the executioner’s axe would shorten him by a head. *Benissimo!*”

CHAPTER XX.

THE ESCAPE.

PAOLI was no sooner left to his own bitter reflections, than he threw himself on the ground almost in despair. As he did so, with his usual impetuosity, and without paying attention to the length of his chain, he gave a violent jerk to the fettors, and, to his astonishment, the huge eye-bolt in the wall, into which his chain was padlocked, came out, and fell to the ground. Springing to his feet, with thanksgiving to Providence, he took up the bolt, and as a faint light—for it was then day—entered the chamber through a strong grating on the top of the wall, he examined the bolt. It was about three feet in length, and passed through an iron socket into the next chamber. In the end of the bolt was a hole for a stout pin to pass through, so as to prevent the bolt from being drawn out. This pin must either not have been inserted, or else it had dropped out by accident.

“Perhaps,” thought Paoli, “they have forgotten to examine whether the pin was properly placed. If so, and if they remember their neglect, they will be here in a body, and see what has happened.”

On looking at the bolt, it at once struck him that by inserting its smaller end into the staple that joined the iron clasp round his body, he could snap it, and thus free himself altogether of the ponderous chain.

With a powerful wrench, that caused him intense pain, he snapped the link. It next occurred to him to replace immediately the bolt in the socket ; which he did ; and then, readjusting the iron round his waist, and tying it so as to keep it up with a strip of his torn garment, he threw himself on the straw, tired and exhausted, to ponder how he was next to proceed.

He had not reposed for more than a few moments, when he

distinctly heard, on the other side of the wall, the blow as of a heavy hammer upon iron.

"They are driving a pin into the bolt," thought the Corsican.

The sounds ceased, and, after some moments of delay, he arose and tried the bolt: it was firm as a rock.

"They had forgotten to examine the pin, that is evident," thought our hero. "I will take it as a good omen," he mentally ejaculated; "and, with the aid and blessing of Providence, I shall effect my escape from this nest of villains."

All was quiet throughout the mansion. Paoli felt thirsty; and as the pitcher containing water was within his reach, he drank, and was refreshed. While doing so, a thought struck him. The vessel was of brass or copper, and extremely heavy.

"Not a bad weapon," thought our hero, as he poised it in his hand. "A blow of this would surely brain one of those infernal negroes; and if I can possess myself of his short sword, I think I shall be a match for the rest."

As yet, Paoli had not touched the vessel placed beside the pitcher, containing, he was aware, some kind of food. But as the faint light of day receded, and a deep gloom pervaded his miserable chamber, he felt nature required sustenance, notwithstanding the agony of his thoughts. The food was certainly not inviting; but Paoli, accustomed during his early life to hard and scanty fare, when forced to seek shelter in the mountains of his native land, ate sparingly of what was before him, and, shortly afterwards, fell into a deep slumber.

Thus passed the first night after his capture. The following day, and several hours of the night, also wore away, and he began to feel the fever of impatience stealing over him, when the sounds of bolts drawn back aroused his attention. Standing close by the pitcher, with one hand resting on the place where he had slightly fastened the iron ring round his body, so as to hide the broken staple, and with a quick-beating but resolute heart, he determined to dare his fate.

The door swung back, and the detestable old crone, followed by two of the blacks, with naked cutlasses, or short swords, in their hands, entered. The old woman "grinned horribly a ghastly smile," as she desired one of the blacks to put the water he carried into the pitcher, while she poured the contents of a large bowl into the pan that held the Corsican's food, saying,—

"You can eat, I see. Ha! ha! It's pleasant to think this is the last meal we shall have to provide for you."

As the black advanced, Paoli stooped and raised the pitcher to his lips. Refreshed by the draught, for his mouth was parched by intense anxiety, he suddenly swung the ponderous

vessel, with terrible force, at the head of the negro, who, without a groan, fell senseless to the ground. His comrade, with a frantic yell, aimed his cutlass at Paoli's head ; but the Corsican was prepared. Dropping the ponderous chain, he sprang upon the body of the prostrate black, seizing his cutlass. The aim of the other negro, nevertheless, found its victim. The wretched old woman had darted forward to seize the garments of the prisoner, on seeing him spring forward. The blow, therefore, fell, without his having power to check it, right on the skull of the old crone. With a shriek that rang through the silent mansion, she dropped, pierced to the brain, beside the prostrate negro. Before another moment had elapsed, Paoli had struck the remaining black helpless to the ground ; then, snatching up the light, he rushed from the chamber.

A long passage was without, at one end of which was a flight of stairs. Paoli took the turn to the left. As he did so, he heard the sound of a man's voice shouting from above, and, instantly after, other voices. Then came the tramp of heavy feet descending the stairs. Rushing along the passage, he arrived at a door fastened by bolts on his side. Pulling these back, and dashing open the door, he beheld a flight of many stone steps. He was now seen by half a dozen men descending the stairs, he first noticed on leaving his prison. On beholding him, they raised a shout of rage and a volley of imprecations. The Corsican rushed at a bound down the flight of steps, and along a narrow passage.

The sounds of his pursuers came nearer and nearer. Another door now barred his passage : it was bolted and fast locked. Mad with excitement, the knight threw himself with all his power against this, as he hoped, only barrier to liberty. Shouts of exultation reached his ear ; his pursuers were in the same long passage, when the door gave way with a crash, and Paoli fell forward, somewhat stunned with the shock. The bright vault of heaven was now above him ; but, alas ! he had only burst his way into a very small court-yard, surrounded by a wall upwards of fifteen feet high.

"Now to God, and my weapon, I trust my life !" ejaculated the knight, as he turned to meet his enemies ; when his eyes fell upon a tall ladder, resting against the house.

With a fervent prayer to Heaven, he seized the ladder, placed it against the outer wall, and rapidly ascended. As he gained the top, his pursuers rushed with shouts and curses into the court ; but Paoli, with a force of which many strong men would have been incapable, raised the ladder, before the persons below could seize it ; and, in the peril of the moment, he let it fall on the other side. A burst of imprecations issued from the two

blacks and four men, in the garb of common sailors, who filled the court below ; but Paoli did not hesitate a moment. He saw there was a wide ditch behind the wall ; and into it he dropped, heedless of its contents or depth ; for he conjectured his enemies would seek the nearest egress to pursue him.

Extricating himself from a mass of stagnant and filthy water, the fugitive hastened across a heap of ruins, and thence into a kind of square of ruined and deserted houses. The night was far advanced ; and, though fine, was dark. He had not the most remote idea where he was ; but hastened on, expecting each moment to enter some habitable part of the city. He was then crossing the spot called the “plague-ground.” After innumerable stumbles over ruined walls, and half-filled ditches he found himself, as well as he could judge by the appearance of the houses in the darkness of the night, among dwellings tenanted by the poorer class of Greeks.

While he paused to regain breath, and return thanks to Heaven for his most fortunate escape from his unknown enemies, a glowing light suddenly illuminated the sky above his head, increasing every moment in brightness. Paoli soon became convinced that a fierce fire raged in a distant part of the city, and this idea was confirmed by the great bell of Santa Sophia, which suddenly sent forth its solemn and awful peal on the dead stillness of the night.

As he hastened along, the windows of many of the houses were thrown up hastily, and half-dressed men and women gazed forth in alarm, many of whom rushed from their houses, and hastened towards the quarter whence myriads of sparks and vast volumes of smoke were seen to mount into the sky.

“Where is this fire ?” demanded Paoli of a Greek, one of a group hurrying towards the scene of destruction.

“In the great street leading from Santa Sophia to the hospital,” exclaimed the man, gazing for a moment at the strange costume of the Corsican.

Paoli started. This was the street in which stood the mansion of the merchant Alviano. Dropping the cutlass he still carried in his hand, the knight, with an anxious mind, followed the now great crowd hurrying forward, eager to be spectators ; many hoping to be plunderers.

The glare of the fire, as they advanced, lit the houses and streets with a radiance more dazzling than the day. The flames rose high above the intervening houses, shooting in spiral wreaths towards the crimsoned sky. The shouts and cries from the men, and the wild shrieks of the women—the rapid tolling of the various bells of that quarter of the city—the galloping of the guards, with the glare of the fire flashing from their

bright armour, altogether formed a sight and created a din which almost bewildered our hero.

At length he came upon the scene of the disaster ; and beheld, with horror, the entire side of the noble street in which stood Alviano's house one vast sheet of flame. Thousands of human beings thronged the scene of danger ; some assisting to save the miserable and half-naked inhabitants ; others, eager for plunder, perishing in the very act. It was a heart-rending sight ; the mother shrieking for her child—the child for its lost mother. For a second Giacinto stood appalled ; but the next, he plunged madly through the mass, and paused not till he reached the blazing front of the merchant's mansion. A circle of guards surrounded the spot, while numbers of men were hurrying to and fro in wild confusion.

As he reached the place, Paoli beheld his own squire, Pulini, rushing from the mansion, bearing upon his stout shoulders the Signor Alviano, their garments scorched and blazing. In a voice fearfully distinct, even amid the roar and the crackling of the fire, the merchant cried out,—

“ My child ! my child ! Ten thousand piastres, nay, all my wealth, to him who saves my child ! ”

But the wall of fire that now presented itself appalled the stoutest heart.

With a cry of agony, Paoli dashed aside the mob ; and, partly covering his head with his well-soaked garment, disappeared amid the flames, while a cry of horror burst from the spectators, as they beheld the doomed victim of gallantry or avarice thus rush madly upon destruction.

Still the fire raged on with unabated violence, unchecked by the simple means used in those days. And when the morning sun broke in wintry splendour upon the scene of the past night's horrors, nothing remained of the splendid mansions that lined the noble street of Santa Sophia but a mass of blackened ruins and smoking timbers.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HOLE IN THE WALL.

In a large chamber, sumptuously furnished, the merchant, Alviano was reclining on a sofa, on the morning after the fire. By his side sat our hero, altered in dress and appearance since we last introduced him to our readers, plunging amid the flames of the merchant's house. His left arm was supported in a sling. His fine head of hair had totally vanished, excepting the few crisped and burnt edges round the crown : his forehead and face were also somewhat scorched ; but otherwise he was sound and

well, and in uncommon high spirits. The Signor Alviano was but slightly burned about the hands and head, but much bruised. A young female was busy bathing his temples with a cooling lotion.

"Why, my son," said the merchant, "you bear scorching better than a salamander. You scarcely heed the suffering from your burns."

"My dear sir," replied Paoli, "the delight of saving my beloved Agnes would blunt the agony of martyrdom at the stake. But here comes the Signora Tolmeo. How fares it now with your beloved charge, signora?"

"Excepting the loss of a few ringlets, and the effect of terror, she has sustained no injury, and will, I make no doubt, be able to rise to-morrow and join us at breakfast. She almost raves of your wonderful strength and gallantry, Signor Paoli, and your marvellous appearance at such a moment. In truth, I am as anxious to hear of your adventures as Agnes."

While Paoli is relating his recent dangers to his anxious and curious auditors we will account for the almost unlooked-for salvation of Agnes from the flames that utterly destroyed the merchant's mansion, though the stores beneath remained uninjured, being arched with stone in case of fire, which frequently happened in the narrow streets of Byzantium, where most of the houses were built of wood.

When the Corsican, with desperate recklessness of life, plunged amid the flames, his well-soaked and muddy garment, to a certain extent, protected him in his first rush through the wall of fire. Scorched and half suffocated with the flame and smoke that filled the hall, amid the crackling of the burning timbers, the falling of beams, and the fearful roar of the destructive element, Giacinto, as he rushed up the half consumed stairs, caught the shrieks of female voices.

Leaping, with desperate energy, over an awful chasm in the stairs, he gained, after incredible efforts, the corridor leading to the sleeping apartments of Agnes and the Signora Tolmeo—fortunately for the latter, she had gone that night to visit a sick friend: as he rushed on, battling the flames, and escaping by miracle the falling rafters, he heard a crash behind him, followed by an increased roar of the furious element. He cast a look back—retreat that way was gone, for the platform and entire remaining stairs had disappeared. At that moment, through the smoke, he beheld Agnes upon her knees, her head pressed upon the shoulder of her favourite attendant, and her fine hair streaming wildly over her garments. The platform on which she knelt was, as yet, untouched by the flames; but, like a devouring fiend, on came the fire, climbing the pillars,

and greedily shooting its forked tongues over the platform on one side.

' A fervent thanksgiving to God burst from the lips of the knight, as he shouted,—

"Agnes, my beloved one, throw yourself from the platform into the arms of one who will perish with, or save you."

With a wild cry of delight and unbounded astonishment, the maiden started to her feet at the sound of that well-known voice.

"Courage, light of my life!" he exclaimed, extending his arms; "the spot you stand on trembles."

Without hesitation, Agnes threw herself into his embrace. He caught her with ease in his powerful arms, and even aided her attendant, who leaped after. The next moment the flames rushed, as it were, rejoicingly over the spot. The remaining pillars snapped, and down went the platform, thundering into the flaming abyss below.

Fortunately the fall of the platform and the adjoining chamber for the instant crushed the fire between the Corsican and a door leading to the balcony looking out from the back. Pressing Agnes close to his breast, and covering her head with his upper garment, he burst through the flames and through the door. Here, also, all was flame and smoke. Followed by the horror-stricken attendant, whose screams were fearful, as she felt the scorching heat, he gained the balcony. Volumes of flames were bursting from all the windows of the house, revealing everything beneath in startling distinctness. As he appeared in the balcony, a wild cheer burst from numerous voices below, and a tall ladder was raised against the balcony by a man, whom Paoli at once knew to be his squire, Pulini.

"My master—my beloved master!" shouted Pulini, as he distinguished the lofty figure and countenance of the Corsican.

The descent of the ladder was a perilous feat, for the flames rushed out of the windows below in vast sheets; but Paoli did not hesitate. He commenced to descend, though the ladder shook with his weight. The poor girl who followed him uttered a cry of horror, and, terrified by the flames that burst out even on the light balcony on which they stood, staggered and fell forward. With a desperate effort, the gallant Corsican grasped her by the garments. The next instant, before he could recover his hold of the ladder, it snapped; and all the knight could do was to clasp his beloved in his arms and leap forward, so as to take the shock of the fall on himself. But the forethought and activity of Pulini saved them from broken limbs. He had covered the ground beneath the balcony with every available article sufficiently soft to break their fall.

Paoli escaped with a severely bruised arm. Agnes was almost unhurt; but the poor girl was senseless when taken up, though she eventually recovered, after a tedious and painful illness.

In the meantime Paoli related to the Signor Alviano and the Signora Tolmeo his seizure by some unknown enemy, and his most fortunate escape. In vain was every effort of thought exerted in conjectures as to who this unknown enemy was. Paoli knew of no human being to whom he could impute the outrage. Pisani had been forced to sail the night before the fire for Negropont; but during the two days of Paoli's absence he had never ceased to exert himself to discover the cause. Day and night Pulini, with a strong party of his Venetian crew, searched every suspected habitation in the city. As to Agnes, her alarm was great; and had a few days more passed without tidings she would have considered her lover lost to her for ever. And we may justly say, so firm and devoted was her heart, that the blow would have rankled there for ever.

"How did this fire originate, signor?" demanded Paoli. "The loss must be terrible to the merchants residing in that street."

"Only trifling," replied the Signor Alviano; "few had any merchandise of value in their stores. The only three really wealthy merchants residing in Santa Sophia were, like myself, provided against accidents, by vaults built purposely to resist fire. How the fire originated is not yet known. It broke out in the house adjoining mine; and so extremely rapid was the destructive element, that if Pulini, who spent the night out hunting for your place of concealment—for your worthy squire would have it you were kidnapped—had not arrived first at the scene of disaster, and burst in our doors, we should have perished. But the flames had already pierced our mansion in three places. A heavy gale was blowing. Blinded with smoke and terror, I was rushing into the midst of the flames, thinking to reach my child, when Pulini seized me and carried me off like a child, let me down, and then ran off to the back of the mansion with ladders, intending to save my beloved daughter. But without you, my son, my child would have perished; when, in truth, the days of Alviano had been numbered."

Nearly a week passed before Paoli beheld his beautiful betrothed; but the meeting amply repaid our hero for the dangers and sufferings he had undergone.

The following week, Admiral Pisani and the entire Venetian and Catalan fleet were expected before Byzantium, for it was evident that a contest must take place between the combined fleets. The emperor's galleys were now completely ready for

sea ; and Greek and Venetian equally longed for a trial of strength ; for while things remained as they were, commerce beyond the Propontis was at a stand. The galleys of Admiral Doria swarmed in the Archipelago ; and the young nobility of Genoa, whose numbers were said to amount to more than a thousand, longed to commence hostilities.

Paoli, having a day to spare, determined to pass an hour or so in endeavouring to discover the place where he so narrowly escaped, falling a victim to an unknown enemy. With Pulini, and six men belonging to his own galley, he commenced his search. After a considerable time spent in vain, he recollect ed the ruinous state of many of the houses about the place from which he had escaped. On mentioning this to their Greek guide, he said,—

“ Let us go to the plague-ground.”

To this place they at once proceeded ; and, after a long search amid the miserable houses, Paoli at length recognized the ditch into which he had thrown himself, and the high wall about it. They then proceeded to the front. The house had once been a large and substantial one ; but not a vestige of a window frame was now left. The roof also had fallen in ; and the walls, which were of stone, were dripping with moisture and stained by mildew. No door of any kind barred their entrance.

“ This is certainly the house,” said Paoli to his squire. “ But my worthy friends have walked off with the door. Take care on entering to avoid the trap down which I was precipitated.”

“ It makes me shudder,” said Pulini, “ to think of the fearful risk you ran. But here is the hole, sure enough, and open, and no sign of a trap or door to it.” It looked as black as night below them.

One of the sailors threw a ponderous stone down to try the depth, and a loud splash of water followed.

“ That is singular,” remarked the Corsican, as he proceeded along the narrow hall. “ There was no water there a few nights ago.”

“ I remember having heard,” said the Greek guide, “ that the vaults under this plague-ground are inundated in the winter by the waters of the Golden Horn : for you see this spot lies very low ; and the deep fosses are filled now to overflowing from the same source.”

Paoli examined several chambers ; and at length entered the very one in which he had been fastened to the wall. Not an article of any sort remained in the room ; but on the floor it was easily seen that a quantity of blood had fallen.

“ The wretched old hag no doubt perished on that spot.”

said the Corsican. "But what have we here?" he continued, as he advanced to examine the hole in the wall, where the eye-bolt had been fixed. A paper was nailed just over the orifice. Paoli took it down, and read aloud the few lines on it, written in good Italian:—

"We are sorry to find that the Signor Paoli did not relish his place of abode. Twenty-four hours longer would have consigned him to one from whence there could be no return. 'Tis the chances of war. Let the Signor Paoli take care; for there are twenty poniards in Byzantium ready sharpened and thirsting for revenge."

Paoli smiled as he tore the paper to pieces; while Pulini stood confounded.

"Say nothing of this, Pulini," said the knight; "it is needless alarming the Signor Alviano's family by imparting to them the idle boast of a gang of baffled ruffians. Let us just have a look at the rooms above."

They entered several, all capable of being inhabited, but perfectly bare of all the necessaries of life. Not a single article remained.

"They have certainly not left a vestige behind them," said Paoli. "It is quite useless either continuing our investigation or tormenting our minds about such miscreants."

"Signor," exclaimed the squire, in a very exasperated tone, "the sooner we sail to meet our old foes the better. We can see them, and feel them, and, thanks to the Virgin, make them feel us in return. But these lurking assassins strike in the dark. I thought, when we quitted Venice, that we had done with masks and poniards, and such like cowardly weapons. But here, *cospetto*, we have twenty sharpening for us."

"Ready sharpened, Pulini," returned Paoli, with a hearty laugh. "Cheer up, my worthy friend. In a few days we shall have too much to do even to think of such impotent threats."

Paoli was right. The very next morning Pisani arrived in his galley, with the intelligence that the Venetian and Catalan fleet had left their harbours, and were in full sail for Byzantium.

Pisani was overjoyed at seeing his friend, the Corsican, safe and sound. He listened to his account of his adventures with surprise; but, like the knight himself, he felt little uneasiness concerning the threat of the twenty poniards.

"We shall," he remarked, "have scarcely an hour to spare on shore; for there is not a shadow of doubt that this dispute between our rival republics will be settled in the waters of the Propontis. Doria and his galleys have left their

winter quarters ; and, before long, we shall see them before Byzantium."

If Paoli was indifferent with respect to the threats of his enemies, not so was Pulini. There was no selfishness in his uneasiness, for the honest squire only cared for his beloved master. Not even from the Arsenal to the hired mansion the Signor Alviano inhabited would he permit his master to go without wearing some defensive armour ; while he secretly had him watched by four of the crew, natives of Corsica, shipped as part of the seamen at Venice. Agnes knew nothing of the threatened poniards. Nevertheless she felt more easy in her mind on observing that her lover took some precautions against any further attack of his unknown enemies.

For the last few days the merchant had been busy in removing the ruins of his once splendid mansion from over the vaults, and in recovering the valuable stores beneath. He felt increasing anxiety for the termination of the war, and most desirous for the union of his child with Paoli. He looked upon the events forthcoming with deep interest and some apprehension, being aware of the deep affection of his gentle daughter for the Corsican ; aware, also, of the impetuosity and reckless chivalry of his intended son-in-law, who would be sure, in the eager desire of performing an action of note, to do some desperate feat. He trembled, at times, when the thought rushed through his mind that, should the Corsican fall in the coming strife, his daughter's happiness would be wrecked for ever.

At length the combined fleets of Arragon and Venice entered the Bosphorus. Seventy-five noble galleys anchored before Byzantium. Agnes beheld this magnificent sight from a balcony ; and if her sight was gratified by beholding so imposing and picturesque a scene, her little heart beat somewhat faster when she thought of what was to follow.

The Catalan galleys were commanded by one of the bravest admirals in the service of Spain, Ponsio De Santa Paz, who merited a better fate than fell to his lot.

CHAPTER XXII.

PLOT AND PROJECTS.

ON the ramparts of the tower of Galata stood three individuals, looking with extreme interest upon the galleys of the Venetian and Catalan squadron, as they majestically swept up the port of Byzantium and anchored.

The three individuals were the commander of the tower, his worthy lieutenant, and their villainous associate, Paulo Montoni.

"Those are noble galleys, well manned and handled," exclaimed Montoni, who, a sailor from his childhood, loved all belonging to seafaring life.

"The galleys of Doria are very much larger," remarked Campaldino; "and half the nobility of Liguria walk their decks."

"*Cospetto*, there will be some broken heads," said Achilles, rubbing his own huge caput, and yawning terrifically. "What a botch you made of that last job, Montini: not that I know much about it. The only part of your conference I heard the other night was that the Corsican split your respectable mother's head with a pitcher: a curious weapon that for a knight."

"Tut, man," interrupted Montoni, "you were too drunk to hear anything right. I never had a mother, as far as I know, nor did that cursed Corsican kill the old woman."

"Well, it matters very little, *amico*," returned Achilles, "I wish it was time for dinner; but, as I was saying—*cospetto*, how remarkably hungry this keen breeze off the Propontis makes one feel. It matters very little how an old woman is killed. What's to be done now?"

"Why, you drone," exclaimed Campaldino, "you have done nothing this last three months but eat and drink. Now you must fight a little."

"Eh, *per Bacco*, be it so. I am ready. But, upon my soul, I do not see much use in that, if there is no plunder to be got. I never did fight for glory, and it's rather late to begin. Tell me, *amico mio*, is there no chance of catching this Corsican during this approaching contest?"

"None whatever that I can see," replied Montoni. "He commands one of the finest galleys in the whole fleet; and his crew are all ready to sacrifice life for him."

Turning to Campaldino, who stood wrapped in gloomy thought, gazing out over the fair Propontis, as it lay rippling and sparkling under the cheering beams of a winter's sun—

"You said," observed Montoni, "when we next met you had a plan in your head to unfold. What is it?"

"In the name of all the saints," exclaimed Achilles, "come down from this. We are only filling our stomachs with east wind, which, truth to say, never sat easy upon mine when empty. It's near feeding time, too."

"Did I not know that you can fight at a pinch," testily exclaimed the commander of Galata, as he led the way from

the battlements, "I would not take the weight, in beef, of that carcase of thine a week to feed thee."

"*Cospetto*, Andrea, don't grumble. Do you remember when, tumbled over by a blow of a huge stone from the ramparts of Capraja, how this carcase of mine, in a hot, sweltering day in August, carried you on its back, near a mile, to the boats, eh? Was I lazy, then, Andrea? Only show me a prospect of something, after twenty-four hours of as hard fighting as you please, and I am your man."

"Well, well, come below; there is a flask or two of Cyprus left, and I will let you hear a proposal I have to make, for I am tired of this cursed old tower, and of this part of the world altogether."

"St. Antonio! and so am I," responded Montoni, "especially as my trade in Byzantium is knocked on the head. The emperor has ordered all the old ruins in the plague-ground to be cleared away, and a strong fort, as it commands the Horn, to be built on the spot."

"Now," observed Achilles, making himself comfortable by drawing his chair near to the fire, after making, as he termed it, a moderate dinner, "let us hear what you have to say."

"In the first place," commenced Campaldino, "there is little to be gained by holding the command of this tower; and very little prospect of a higher one as long as the unprovided sons of our nobility come out here on speculation. In the next place, we have lost our zebec; and even if we had another, our cruising, for a long time to come, is over. You remember, Achilles, our attempt on the Island of Capraja, some two or three years back."

"I ought to remember it, Andrea. I reminded you, a while ago, how I carried you, like a dead turtle, on my back."

"Yes, I remember it well, and the infernal beating we got from those half-savage islanders. I don't see, even now, what induced you to join that ill-planned expedition."

"Plunder, my worthy *amico*; plunder."

"Plunder!" echoed Furiano. Yes; you talked of something of the kind at the time, but, for the life of me, I can't imagine what plunder there's to be had in an island a man may swim round in six hours. Why, the whole island wouldn't grow enough wine to keep me during the winter."

"And yet, to that very island is my attention directed. We failed before, it is true, for the expedition was ill-planned. We knew nothing of the locality, and were quite ignorant of the existence of a fortress as strong and as imposing as any you may see from the summit of this tower."

Achilles stared at his commander—pitched another log on

the fire—filled his own goblet to the brim—and then, nodding his huge head, said—

“ Go on, captain ; let us hear what the *diavolo* you are going to propose.”

“ Well, I will enlighten you,” returned Andrea. “ Montani can give you all kinds of information with regard to the capabilities of the island in growing wine ; for he will tell you that it grows not only a great quantity of grapes, but that the wine made from them, nearly, if not fully, equals this Cyprus.”

“ And what the *diavolo* brought you upon the island ?” demanded Furiani, turning, with a look of surprise, upon the Italian.

“ Oh ! as to that,” returned Montoni, “ it is easily accounted for. I fled ; or rather, I should say, was recommended change of air, that of Livorno getting rather hot for me. I was so pressed as to time that I was glad to sail on the instant in a small tartana bound for Capraja. I thought a few months residence there might be to my advantage, being then a younger man, and a devilish good-looking fellow to boot. You may laugh, Achilles, but my nose was not broken then. I captivated a Caprese maiden of the household of the Marchese Damari. Well, we are all subject to weak moments, and I fell in love with the girl, and was persuaded to offer myself as a valet to the Marchese, his former man having died suddenly of a brain fever.”

“ Are you spinning a yarn, as you sailors call it ?” demanded Furiani, turning his dark eyes upon his companion. “ Is there a word of truth in what you are relating ?”

“ *Per Bacco*, you are polite, Achilles,” said Montoni, laughing. “ But it’s all truth. You are, perhaps, surprised at a man of my genius taking the place of a valet. But, *pazienza*, I had something else in view besides pressing the hands of this fair *ragazza*. The Marchese, a fine-looking man at that time, resided in the old castle built by one of his ancestors. A fine stately building it is. Either he or his father built the fortress that now commands and guards the harbour.”

“ Fill your goblet, Paulo, you are getting very dry,” said Furiani. “ St. Anthony ! what will all this turn to in the end ?”

“ *Aspetta, aspetta, amico mio*. It will come to something by and by. But if you do not keep quiet the wine will be out before my story is done. The Marchese,” continued he, “ is the feudal lord of Capraja, and his revenue is much more considerable than you would suppose. A faro is kept lighted on the fortress hill ; and the harbour is one of the finest for its size in the Mediterranean. Hundreds of vessels take refuge

there when gales blow out of the Gulf Genoa. All the inhabitants pay a certain tax. But now to the pith of what I have to say. The Marchese, after asking me a few questions, accepted my services for a time ; and I took up my abode in the castle. The Marchese's father had married an Italian lady, one of the wealthiest heiresses in all Italy, especially in land, houses, and jewels. The Marchese, when married, converted the whole into gold, and carried it, with his bride, to his favourite island. The wealth, so realised, is said to be enormous, and is secured in immense iron chests, in some strong chamber of the castle."

Achilles now looked somewhat more interested.

"These particulars," pursued Paoli, "I learned during a three months' residence in the castle. Finding time, notwithstanding the caresses of pretty Annette, hang heavily on my hands, and stumbling, by chance, upon the Marchesa's jewel-case, one moonlight night, when I was struck with the beauty of the rippling sea, I induced a Capraja lad, who was settling his nets, to let me have an hour's pull outside the pier. We were hailed by the look-out ; for a strict watch is kept up, as they are always dreading an attack from the Genoese. The lad answered, and we were soon out. It was blowing off the island, and I was hoisting a sail, when the boy remonstrated ; but being very obstinate by nature, I overruled him. We went too far to turn back ; and about noon next day I landed upon a very pleasant beach, in the Ligurian territory—made the lad a present of a few dollars—for which he returned me as many curses—and begged him to present my regards to the Marchese, and express my regret that the solitude of his island was too much for my nerves. It was not till next day that I recollect I had forgotten to send back the Marchesa's jewel-case.

"I have now said all I have to say, excepting one particular, which is, perhaps, the most important. In one of my rambles, by a singular accident, I discovered a passage from the island to the sea. You know that Capraja is considered perfectly inaccessible, in any part, excepting through the harbour, and in face of the very formidable fortress that commands and blocks the entrance into the interior. I could therefore conduct, with the greatest ease and secrecy, any number of men into the interior of the island. The Castle Damari stands more than a mile from the town, which contains near three thousand inhabitants, or, at least five hundred fighting men. Now, Signor Campaldino will let you know his scheme, for, as usual, you were asleep last night, when we first talked over this business."

During the time occupied by the Italian in relating the above, Campaldino sat with his one eye fixed intently on the blazing wood, wrapped in deep thought. As Montoni finished, he turned to his companions, saying—

“I will briefly let you into my projects. A few days ago I attended a meeting of officers before the Commander of Pera. A Genoese carrick had run the gauntlet through the Venetian fleet, to convey important intelligence to our commander. Aboard the carrick were several of our young Ligurian nobles. Amongst them, one *Philippo Baracco*, I knew formerly in Genoa. In the course of conversation, he mentioned, in speaking of his own adventures, that, through the interest of his cousin, the Count Durazzo, he had been appointed governor of Caprera—for an expedition at that time was fitting out to take possession of that island. When just ready for sea, the outbreak against Venice took place; and, at the same time, a dispute with France, which suddenly withdrew her entire force from Corsica. The expedition was countermanded; the men were drafted into the galleys fitting out to proceed against the Venetian admiral; and an additional force was dispatched to Corsica; for there is now every reason to dread an outbreak there. ‘So thus,’ added young Baracco, laughing, ‘ended my governorship.’ ‘Are you aware,’ I asked, ‘that *Giacinto Paoli*, son of Count Paoli, the most daring of the Corsican rebels, and who slew my father, then general of our forces in Corsica, is, at this moment, serving under the Venetian banner, and actually in command of one of the finest galleys in the fleet at this moment at anchor in the port of *Byzantium*?’ ‘Yes,’ returned Baracco, ‘I knew he commanded a fine galley, and devilish good reason I had to know it. He is a gallant, high-spirited, and generous fellow, let him be ever so great a rebel; though why he should be styled a rebel for defending his native land I cannot imagine.’

“Seeing me look astonished, he continued—‘When I lost my intended governorship, I embarked with my cousin, the Count Durazzo, to join Doria in chasing some Venetian carricks and galleys in the Archipelago. We were attacked by Paoli, in his vessel, the ‘Lion,’ and, after an obstinate fight—for, to tell the truth, we were double her size, and full of men (but, unfortunately, disaffected ones)—and being captured, he, by a very simple *ruse*, enticed our prizes, who were lying in port, to put to sea. He captured them also; and, finally, put us all to ransom. With singular generosity, after all his sufferings from our republic, he left the Count Durazzo to fix the amount of ransom. He then landed us. My cousin had promised me, when I came out, that I should have the command of the Tower

of Galata, of course without knowing it was in your hands. You would, doubtless, have received a higher appointment. 'Which I must beg leave to doubt very much,' I replied, laughing. 'I have neither high birth nor interest to push me on. But I will tell you what I will do, Baracco. You said, even when appointed governor of an island not then conquered, you felt no great fancy to being shut up in a place some fifteen miles in circumference. Now, ask me no questions, but say, if I give up to you the command of this tower and fort, will you use your great interest with your cousin, the Count Durazzo, should I succeed in gaining possession of that said island of Capraja, and get me appointed governor?' 'By the Pope,' replied he, 'I will do more. I will hand over to you my letters-patent, which I still hold. The power is mine to transfer them, and was purposely given me at my own request. All we have to do is to alter the name; and, besides, I may venture to say, you shall be backed and helped by all my cousin's interest, the moment this contest ends. If favourable to Genoa, on your return there, you will have hundreds of volunteers to aid you, provided the funds are forthcoming. As to me, *per Bacco*, my ransom, easy as it was, has drained my exchequer. One reason for my wishing for a temporary command, till something better turns up here, is that, to say the truth, I have the prospect, after two years, of having the command of this colony.'

"I closed at once with Philippo Baracco; and now all I have to say is, that the moment this contest, with which we shall, as guardians of this tower and fort, have nothing to do, is over, I intend chartering a good craft for Genoa, put our spoils, etc., aboard; and, when we reach that city, follow up the plan you have heard. Should we even fail in gaining possession of the fortress by surprise, we are certain of sacking the Castle of Damari, and of gaining possession of the crusaders' treasures. Afterwards, there will be a fair field for adventures in Corsica for I know enough of the islanders to be able to say positively, they will break out into open rebellion the moment the French gendarmerie are withdrawn from the island."

"By the mass, I rather like your scheme," said Furiani. "I feel satisfied the fortress of Capraja would prove a much more agreeable residence than this. Besides, the climate here is only fit for a salamander. Were it not for my system of damping my interior with the juice of the grape, I should have been scorched to a cinder ere this."

"It will be better," observed Montoni, "to purchase a fast-sailing caravel, which will cost less in the end, and look more respectable on our reaching Genoa. Besides, we may do a

little business on the voyage. The Archipelago will be swarming with crafts, now that the two rival fleets are in the Propontis. I can find twenty first-rate hands."

"But what do you intend to do with your wife—eh, Paulo?" suddenly interrupted Achilles. "Shall you bring her with us?"

"No, by the mass, no," replied the Italian. "Our union was one of convenience. In fact, she belongs to the gang: that is, she becomes the wife of the leader, whoever he may be. And I may as well say it now, she has, by this time, absconded with my black friend, whom she was going to marry. I believe my broken nose hastened the catastrophe. They are gone, I believe, to Gallipoli."

"If we could only get this Paoli with us," observed Campaldino, "the reward offered for his capture by the Genoese Government would fit out our expedition to Capraja."

"Well, we shall see," said Montoni. "Perhaps, during this approaching battle, something may turn up to throw him into our hands."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BATTLE.

ALL now became bustling anxiety throughout Byzantium. Doria and his fleet had entered the sea of Marmora, passed close to the coast on which stood the stronghold of the Grecian empire, and then steering for the opposite shore, the fleet was drawn up in order of battle.

Admiral Pisani hoisted the signal, that, in four hours, he would weigh anchor, and engage the enemy.

After buckling on his armour, Paoli hastened to take leave of his betrothed and her father. Agnes received her lover with much agitation, and, despite every effort of her mind, with tears.

"Why weep, dearest?" exclaimed the knight, as he pressed the fair hand he held to his lips. "A soldier's bride must summon her courage; and the trumpet's blast should raise smiles, not tears."

"Ah, Giacinto," replied the maiden—looking with fond admiration, and yet dread, upon the noble figure of her betrothed—"to man the trumpet's blast only raises the spirit and quickens the blood; but to the mother, the wife, the lover, it drives back the chilled blood to the heart. No, dearest, you cannot feel like our timid sex. In the midst of horrid strife there is no room for reflection. But we, in the agony of suspense, in the solitude of our chambers, with our thoughts

fixed on those we love—our imaginations, sleeping or waking, excited by a thousand fearful fancies —”

The utterance of Agnes here failed her: she could not finish what her heart prompted her to say; but leaning her fair face on the mailed breast of her lover, she gave way to tears.

Paoli soothed in a measure the grief of Agnes, who was rendered more apprehensive than she otherwise would have been by the late attempt upon her lover's life.

“To-morrow, dearest,” said Giacinto, “will end this strife. Who will be the victor can be known only to the Almighty. That the banner of St. Mark may float triumphant is my earnest prayer. We certainly outnumber the enemy.”

“Ah, yes,” interrupted Agnes; “but Pisani said the vessels of Genoa are double your size.”

“The more glory in beating them, my beloved,” said Paoli, with a smile and a kiss, which brought back the rich colour to the pale cheek of the maiden.

They parted as fond lovers part—the knight to his galley—the maiden, with a beating heart, to the solitude of her chamber. She cast one look from the window, out upon the then troubled waters of the Propontis. Dark masses of wintry clouds hung over the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus; and fierce and sudden gusts of wind swept over the city, with a moaning and threatening sound.

In the arsenal, Giacinto found the Signor Alviano, Pisani, and many of the Venetian residents. Paoli's galley was warping out, followed by those of Pisani and the Count de Lordini.

“Well, my son,” said the Signor Alviano, striving to look cheerful: “you are about to try the issue. May God grant the banner of St. Mark the victory! But this is fearful weather. There is every appearance of a fierce tempest brooding over the sea. The wind howls most dismally.”

“A good stiff breeze, my dear sir, is very desirable,” returned Paoli. “Our vessels are much more manageable than in calms. Those Greeks handle their crafts but indifferently; and, *per Bacco*, with seeming hesitation.”

“Never trust the Greeks, except when you have the advantage on your side,” whispered the merchant, as he affectionately embraced the Corsican, when he stepped from the galley on the quay.

As the galley weighed and ran out of harbour, they formed into a line with the admiral's galley, from which waved the gorgeous banner of St. Mark. It was a spirit-stirring, animating scene. The day was cold and inclement. At intervals fierce gusts of wind swept over the narrow sea, and vast and

threatening masses of lurid clouds passed on at times, allowing the wintry sun to shine for a brief period. Its rays then fell upon the countless multitude that lined the shore, the ramparts, and bastions of Byzantium. The decks of the galleys were crowded with mailed knights, whose shields hung along the sides of the vessels, and, when the sun shone upon them, resembled a solid defence of sparkling steel.

In the far distance could be seen the ships of Doria, breasting the wild waves of the straits ; at times hidden in the descending shower ; then, as the vapours passed away, becoming distinctly visible. The decks of the Genoese men-of-war also appeared as one mass of steel-clad figures.

Notwithstanding the efforts of Pisani, it was near sunset before the fleets engaged ; and, at that period, the gale had increased to a hurricane. In the gloom, then, of a heavy tempest, commenced the strife. Perfectly acquainted with the navigation of the Bosphorus, and having pilots who were aware of the currents and shoals that abound on the Asiatic side, Doria gave the signal to his fleet to run in amid the rocks and shoals of that dangerous shore.

The gallant admiral of the Catalans, Ponsio De Santa Paz, followed without hesitation ; as also did Paoli, Pisani, and Loridan, all whose pilots were well acquainted with the channels. The Catalans, ignorant of the dangers, fought desperately, but in vain. Ten of their best galleys perished on the sunken rocks.

Notwithstanding the fearful storm, that gained ground as the night came on, galley grappled with galley with bitter animosity ; while the agitated waters beat with frightful roar over the sunken rocks that were scattered around. As the day closed, the Grecian galleys fled ; still the battle raged. Paoli had daringly followed Santa Paz, and fixed himself to a galley of superior size, full of armed knights. Pisani passed him with a loud cheer from his crew, as he made fast to another. The war-cry of Paoli was answered by the crew of the Genoese galley, who shouted their commander's name, Grimaldi.

The strife commenced, while the galleys were carefully handled by their pilots, to keep them off the sunken rocks. Fierce and bloody was the contest ; for night shed its dismal veil over the combatants. Still the battle-axe of Paoli swept the deck of the Genoese with terrible might. His crew had been reinforced before he left Byzantium by many volunteer knights and Venetians, who were excited by the example of the Corsican.

At length the decks of the Genoese galley were gained, and Grimaldi himself was taken prisoner by Paoli, who spared his

life. Grimaldi then surrendered his galley, and retired from the struggle, while Paoli, during the remainder of that awful night, fought with the same gallantry and extreme good fortune. He rescued from destruction the galley of Santa Paz, after striking on a sunken rock, and towed the vessel into safe water. Two other galleys fell into his hands ; and, when morning broke, Pisani gave the signal to his galleys to regain the port of Byzantium. But few survived the horrors of that night to obey the signal.

Historians of that time describe this battle, fought in darkness during an awful tempest, and rendered memorable on account of the incredible bitterness and fierceness of the combatants, as the most sanguinary contest of that century.

The galley of Pisani, dismasted and shattered, was taken in tow by Paoli and the Count Lordini. The younger Pisani had, alas ! perished with his galley and his gallant crew upon the sunken rocks of that fatal shore.

As the sun rose, gloomy and lowering, over the fatal scene of the last night's contest, the prospect presented a sad picture to contrast with the glorious spectacle of the preceding evening.

The sea was covered with spars, masts, boats, and half-drowned wretches, clinging with fearful tenacity to pieces of wreck. The Asiatic shore was strewn with corpses and stranded galleys. As the day increased, each party could more easily discover vestiges of its own loss than of triumph over the enemy. Thirteen of the finest galleys of Genoa were dashed to pieces on the rocks ; six were swept away down the channel of the Bosphorus. Ten Catalans perished ; and fourteen Venetian galleys had been captured or destroyed. Eighteen hundred prisoners were taken by the Genoese ; and yet they claimed but a very doubtful victory ; for, if historians are to be believed, of their nobility alone seven hundred perished. In fact, had not Pisani hoisted his signal to retreat, the battle was a drawn one. Ponciano de Santa Paz, unable to survive his defeat, died of a broken heart.

Paoli's galley had suffered much in killed and wounded. He himself was severely injured, but still able to command. His faithful squire was so desperately hurt by a fallen mast as to be unable to leave his couch. Several knights of note had fallen aboard the Lion. But the Corsican's share of glory was great ; for he brought into the port of Byzantium the galley of Grimaldi, and two others, as prizes, besides about thirty prisoners of knightly rank.

Paoli felt greatly depressed at the fate of the gallant young Pisani. The Count Lordini lost in that fatal fight his eldest

son and two nephews, scions of the noble house of Contarini. The Admiral Pisani was grieved in heart at the loss of his nephew; but the disgrace, as he conceived it, of his defeat, overpowered every other feeling. Santa Paz refused consolation, and never raised his head. Universal lamentation reigned throughout the city; for hundreds had to deplore the loss of relatives who had perished either by the sword or by shipwreck.

The merchant Alviano received our hero with open arms, and thanksgivings at his safety; for none of his wounds, though severe, were dangerous. Still, much as he wished it, and though his heart beat with anxiety to embrace his betrothed, he was for a few days unable to leave his galley.

Admiral Pisani, knowing that as soon as Doria could collect his scattered and damaged squadron he would invest the port of Byzantium, merely stayed to repair his shattered galley, and then sailed with the remnant of his fleet for Negropont.

Paoli was just able to leave his couch, when he received the admiral's orders to weigh anchor and proceed to Negropont; but as it was his intention, the moment this battle was fought, to quit the Venetian service, the command of his galley was committed to the care of an experienced officer, who sailed for Venice with her and his two prizes, to be delivered over to the Marchese Tiepolo.

The Corsican spent most part of the night in writing to his generous benefactor, the marchese, expressing his deep gratitude, and his reasons for quitting the Venetian service. He also stated that the Signor Alviano held in his hands a large sum lodged to his account, as his proportion of the prizes he had taken since his departure from Venice.

The Count Grimaldi paid a heavy ransom for himself, and his officers, and galley; at the same time passing the highest encomiums on Paoli's gallantry and generosity: saying, moreover, that if ever he should be called into council upon the cause and subjugation of Corsica, his voice should always be in favour of Paoli's countrymen. The Signor Alviano approved highly of the manner his intended son-in-law acted.

The fourth day after the famous battle on the Bosphorus not a Venetian barque remained within the harbour of Byzantium.

Our hero's meeting with Agnes more than compensated for all his perils. Again and again he pressed her to his heart, and vowed that, except to serve his country, he would never more draw sword for a foreign ruler.

Pulini was rapidly recovering. In the meantime, Doria and

his fleet entered the port of Byzantium. Cantacuzenus was forced to yield to the terms of the Genoese admiral. He was induced to sign a separate treaty of peace with Genoa, stipulating to close all his ports against the Venetians and Catalans ; and further, that all Venetian merchants settled in Byzantium should depart the Emperor's dominions within a certain time. If, after that, they should be found within such dominions, their property should undergo confiscation and their persons imprisonment. A Genoese governor, with a strong force and full powers, was appointed to hold Pera and Galata, and to build new forts.

Satisfied with the terms he had gained and the glory he had achieved, Admiral Doria returned to Genoa.

"You see, Giacinto," said the merchant Alviano, one morning after the departure of the Genoese admiral, "you see, these Greeks are not to be trusted. Behold how they have left us. It was extremely fortunate I was so far prepared before the result of this treaty was made known. However, I have nearly shipped all my stores and merchandize. Still we must defer your nuptials till our arrival in Italy. In the present state of this city it would be unwise. No dependence can be placed on the Greeks. However, we have yet a few days."

"Can I do anything to expedite your movements ?" asked Paoli, extremely anxious to leave Byzantium and hasten his union with Agnes.

"By the by, you certainly can save me a day or two," replied the merchant, "and that's something, as things are. If you will take this document to my Greek partner that was, the Signor Negreti, at Scutari, who is slightly indisposed, he will sign it in your presence. Put your own name to it as an attestation. It is our final settlement. You can be back by sunset."

Paoli, with his constant attendant, Pulini, proceeded at once ; and, hiring a four-oared barge, pulled across for Scutari, though it blew half a gale, with every prospect of increasing. Still, as the strait is barely three miles across, our hero troubled himself but little on the score of the wind.

Not so his fair betrothed ; for the gale rapidly increased into a fierce storm, lashing the narrow waters of the Propontis into sheets of foam. Agnes was walking with the Signora Tolmeo, on the terrace at the back of the mansion, which looked out over the storm-tossed waters of the strait of Scutari.

"He will scarcely be able to cross to-night," said Agnes "What a dismal-looking sea ! I would rather he would remain at Scutari than risk the passage in a rowing barge."

"You may make yourself easy, *cara*," returned the Signora

Tolmeo. "Depend on it, the Signor Paoli will cross, notwithstanding this gale. Those rowing barges are the safest and best on these narrow and squally seas. Besides, though not able to cross direct in the face of the gale, he can still make a landing below Pera, and cross the ferry over the Golden Horn."

Shortly after sunset the gale suddenly lulled, and a slight fall of snow took place—a most unusual occurrence at Byzantium. A dead calm followed. Still, when the merchant returned home late, and entered the saloon, and found only the two females, he exclaimed,—

"Where is Paoli? Is it possible he is not returned?"

"My dear father, he has not come back," said Agnes, rather anxiously. "And yet it has been quite calm these two hours. The sea, you know, ceases instantly with the wind in the straits."

"Humph!" uttered the merchant, without a shade of anxiety in his manner, "our friend has probably staid for the night with the Signor Negreti, and will return in the morning. Why, child, you don't say you are uneasy?" added he, seeing a shade pass over the face of his daughter. "Why, crossing to Scutari is no more than crossing a canal in Venice."

"Ah, father," rejoined Agnes, "remember how many a stately galley perished in the late storm and fight, even in these narrow waters."

"Pooh!" ejaculated the merchant, laughing; "if people will fight in storms and bump upon rocks and shoals, they must be shipwrecked. But I will send down to the quay."

The barge had not returned.

Morning came, and still the knight was absent; and Agnes was in an agony of apprehension she knew not of what.

The merchant proceeded at once to the quay, and, to his great astonishment, the first thing he saw was the identical barge lying quietly at her moorings. Wondering why Paoli delayed returning home, he called one of the crew who was loitering on the pier, and demanded when he had come back.

"At break of day, signor," replied the man. "We lay the best part of the night in the bight below Pera, under the old town."

"What, then, you crossed yesterday in the gale, and the Signor Paoli had to stay all night in the barge?"

"All night!" echoed the man, with a look of surprise; "no, surely, signor. The Signor Paoli persisted in crossing in the face of the storm. We had a perilous passage; but we landed the signor and his squire under the town early in the evening; and he immediately started to walk back, crossing by the ferry over the Horn."

Alviano looked amazed. The Greek boatman perceived that something wrong had occurred. The merchant gave the man a handful of coin, saying,—

“ Signor Paoli, strange to say, has not returned. Man your boat, and proceed to the spot where you landed the signor, and make every inquiry and spare no labour. You shall be well rewarded.”

With a foreboding of evil and a heavy heart, the Signor Alviano returned to his mansion. Vainly he strove to conjecture what could have occurred to two strong men, passing through a thickly populated neighbourhood and in broad day.

Agnes met her father at the door of the saloon. His countenance betrayed his anxiety, notwithstanding his efforts to conceal it. Throwing herself on the sofa, the maiden burst into a flood of tears. In vain her kind friend and her father strove to console her, and to prove to her the folly of giving way to such grief, when no just cause as yet existed to call it forth.

“ It may be weak—perhaps unmaidenly,” said the gentle girl, in a desponding tone ; “ but, with only an affectionate father and a kind friend to witness my sorrow, I have not power of mind to struggle against this cruel blow to my peace. Something fatal has happened, my heart tells me so. ‘ Never,’ said Giacinto, the other day, ‘ never, Agnes, I promise you, if the power is left me, will I sleep, while in this land, from under the same roof which shelters you.’ ”

And bending her head upon the bosom of the signora, she wept silently but sadly.

As the day wore on, the merchant, seriously alarmed, ordered his horse, and, with two attendants, set out for the place where Paoli had been landed, a distance of scarcely two leagues. He easily succeeded in tracing Paoli and his squire from the landing-place to the Genoese settlement of Pera. At the gate leading to Byzantium he also gained correct information ; for the warder remembered perfectly well the knight and his squire passing through, and enquiring of him the shortest road to the ferry. He recommended the upper. He could not be mistaken, for the stately figure of the Corsican was remarkable.

More and more astonished, the merchant proceeded to the ferry. There he was baffled. No such persons had passed either that day or the day before.

It was night before Alviano returned home, without having gained the slightest clue to the disappearance of Paoli and his squire after their passing the gate of Pera. No hostilities

then existed between the Greeks, Venetians, or Genoesc ; for the truce was strictly adhered to, and he could only conjecture that Paoli must have fallen into the power of some secret enemy ; but who that enemy was he had no earthly means of discovering.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RETURN TO VENICE.

OUR fair readers can easily imagine the grief and distraction of a young fond heart, with its hopes crushed in the bud. Paoli was the maiden's first love. Reasoners upon human passions may say what they please with respect to first love ; but in our simple thoughts no second love is one half so pure and holy, so totally free from all worldly feelings, as the first love of a maiden's heart.

Day after day passed in hopeless search. Vain were the princely rewards offered by the distracted merchant. No trace of Paoli or his squire could be gained that could tend to unravel the mystery of their disappearance.

The Signor Alviano had sufficient interest with the Greek Government to cause a strict inquiry to be made in Pera, from the Governor there. The reply was that the truce agreed upon had remained inviolate, and no such persons as Paoli and his squire had been molested by his orders. Alviano was stupefied at the blow this inflicted on his daughter's peace. He beheld with anguish the fading cheek of his child, and bitterly deplored the fatal cause of all this sorrow, brought on by his sending Paoli to Scutari. He had fondly pictured to himself the decline of his life, blessed and soothed by the love and affection of his daughter and children. There was another and a secret spring acting on the heart of the merchant. From the very first he had regarded the love Paoli had for his daughter with the greater delight and satisfaction inasmuch as it promised to realise the dream of many a long year : and now, all was wrecked !

“ For what have I now toiled ? ” soliloquised Alviano, in the solitude of his chamber. “ For gold ? Will gold restore the bloom to the cheek of my child ? Will a gorgeous palace, and a train of dependents, give her back the bright hopes that are withered ? Never ! I know too well the heart of my child.”

And yet Agnes Alviano strove nobly to hide from the anxious eye of a doting father the sorrow that was nestling in her heart of hearts. She met him with smiles—alas !

only the ghosts of the smiles of old. She talked with him of Venice; said she still felt satisfied that her lover would yet appear; that some mysterious enemy had him in his toils, through which, with the aid of Providence, he would yet break. At times, indeed, Agnes would endeavour to think as she spoke; and in the sanguine expectations of the Signora Tolmeo, she endeavoured to believe.

Time had meanwhile moved on; the Signor Alviano could no longer delay embarking for Venice. Money and letters were left with a Greek merchant, in case Paoli should appear after their departure.

At length, with heavy hearts and broken spirits, the merchant and his daughter, with the Signora Tolmeo, embarked in a noble galley, chartered to convey them to the city of the waves.

It was a bright morning in the month of March that the merchant and his family sailed from the Grecian capital. As the vessel glided with a favourable breeze from the shore, the sun's rays fell dazzlingly upon tower and fort, cupola, and palace. The line of beautifully diversified coast that runs along both sides of those narrow seas—the numerous towers and strong forts covering the hill tops—the Propontis covered with picturesque barks, that then, as well as now, frequented these confined waters, all presented so beautiful and unequalled a sight that even Agnes, who gazed from the deck of the galley upon a prospect she was never again to behold, could not but express her admiration, though tears filled her eyes as she did so; for her imagination pictured her lover pining somewhere in dreary captivity in the land she was leaving for ever.

At length, after a tedious and protracted passage, Alviano beheld the towers and palaces of Venice rise from the bosom of the sleepy lagunes.

“Twenty years,” sighed the merchant, as he stood upon the deck, with his daughter leaning on his arm, “have passed since I left yonder city. I return,” he mentally added, “wealthy, but heart-stricken. But my child will yet revive. Providence can cure, as well as inflict the wound. Money can purchase prayers.” The merchant hesitated, for his mind was somewhat of a higher tone than the superstition of the age.

Laying his hand on the arm of his thoughtful daughter, he said, pointing to the yet distant, but yet distinctly visible domes of Venice—

“Thirty and one years have elapsed, my beloved child, since your father entered yonder city, an exile, unknowing and unknown, with only a few scudi in his possession. But I had

youth, and an enterprising and untiring disposition ; and Fortune, till then most unkind, smiled upon me."

"And whence, beloved father, did you come ? I have often heard you say you were only an adopted son of the Venetian Republic. Whenever I teased you with questions your reply was always playful, but left me still ignorant of the name of the land that gave you birth."

"Because, light of my heart ! you were as happy as the fondest parent could wish his darling to be. My thoughts were then centred upon Venice as my resting-place, but now my dreams carry me further. Thy ancestors, my sweet child, were Corsican, and of ancient and noble descent."

"Corsican !" echoed Agnes, with a start, and a look of pleasure, while the rich colour came back so suddenly to her cheek that the heart of the father beat quicker with new-raised hopes of returning health and spirits to his daughter.

"Even so, dearest. Corsica is the land of our fathers ; and, more than that, we are connected, by ties of blood, with the noble house of Paoli."

Agnes clasped her hands.

"Were you told this by my —— ?" But she could not bring out the name.

Her sire understood her well.

"No, no, my love. I did not derive this information from him, but from Pulini, who recognised me, though years had gone by. Wait yet a little while, and you shall hear all of your father's eventful life ; and, trust me, I know not why, but I feel at this moment like one inspired, devoutly believing that Providence, which has hitherto protected and smiled upon my exertions, will yet restore the lost Paoli to you and to his country."

"Oh, father !" and the deeply expressive eyes of Agnes were fixed upon his with such love and devotion that the merchant pressed her to his heart with renewed hope.

On sailed the galley. The voyagers passed Chiozzi, rounded the Lido, and, sweeping through the intricate channels (those safeguards of Venice), finally anchored in front of the proud arsenal of the Republic, over which was flauntingly distended the huge waving ensign of the Winged Lion of St. Mark.

Could the merchant Alviano look now, after the lapse of nearly five hundred years, into that same, and still vast arsenal, which formerly could find work for more than three thousand men, and which contained more vessels of war within its boundaries than all the other European Powers put together, how would he have been amazed to see only a few

unfinished hulks, a solitary brigantine or two, the whole navy of a power that once dictated to the Roman Empire !

And how did Agnes feel on breathing the atmosphere of her native country ? Once she had thought that Venice, with its palaces, canals, the square and piazza of St. Mark, thronged by gay and gallant cavaliers, in their sumptuous costumes, was the work of enchantment, or a fairy scene. But Agnes knew not then that the prisons of Venice were too near her gayest palaces ; she was ignorant that even the thoughtless, restless inhabitants seemed to shrink at times, as if some ill-omened spirit hovered over them, and awed their turbulent spirits into gloom and fear.

What a revolution had taken place in the mind and feelings of Alviano's daughter, as she swept up the grand canal ! She beheld the same crowded waters, without pleasure. The once loved square of San Marco caused her to shudder. Her eyes rested on the ducal palace, and she thought of Paoli, and of the decapitated Doge.

At length the gondola stopped before the portals of the Palace Tiepolo, and in a very short time Agnes was clasped with fond remembrance to the hearts of the Marchese's daughters.

Paulina, as she looked fondly in her cousin's face, did not at the first glance (for the delight of meeting her beloved cousins had recalled the colour to her cheek) perceive the ravages made in that fair and lovely face by sorrow—Paulina thought Agnes eminently beautiful ; even more so than she herself had ever imagined.

In some of her letters to Paulina, Agnes had spoken of her intended nuptials with Paoli ; of her happiness, and the prospect before her of rambling through Italy with the chosen of her heart, till the sentence against Paoli should expire ! Paulina had, for an instant, felt sad, and an imperceptible sigh escaped her lips. But envy or jealousy had no resting-place in the heart of the Venetian maiden, who soon banished from her thoughts all recollection of Paoli ; and when Agnes came she was prepared to receive her with all the fond affection to which their early companionship had given rise.

In the bosom of the kind and noble family of Tiepolo, Agnes, if she still pined in the secret solitude of her chamber, bore up, before her fond father and her relations, with apparent resignation.

The Marchese, to whom Paoli was as dear almost as a son, heard, with astonishment and grief, of the mysterious disappearance of the Corsican. At times he almost imagined he had been secretly entrapped, by order of the Venetian

government: for, strange to say, notwithstanding his gallant exploits during the war, and the honest encomiums bestowed upon him by Admiral Pisani, in his despatches, and all the interest exerted for him by the Marchese, and other nobles of Venice, it was impossible to procure the revocation of his sentence.

Count Steno and his contessa had returned to Venice a few days before the arrival of Agnes and her father. Steno was distressed on hearing of Paolo's disappearance, but when the Marchese Tiepolo hinted at the possibility of his having been seized, by order of the Venetian government, for some secret reason of state, Count Steno declared it was utterly impossible. He allowed that Paoli had one enemy among the ten rulers of Venice, though from what cause he could not imagine; neither could he learn the name of that enemy. He also had been baffled in his attempts to procure a remission of Paoli's sentence.

CHAPTER XXV.

ONE OF THE TEN RULERS.

WE must now request our readers to follow us from the mansion of the Marchese Tiepolo, into another palace in Venice a few days after the arrival of the Signor Alviano. The saloon into which we conduct our readers was the grand reception room of one of the noblest edifices in Venice, belonging to Count Luigi Passarini, lord of Cerego, and one of the Council of Ten.

It was night, and the saloon was brilliantly lighted. The furniture, according to the times and the luxury and wealth of the Venetian nobles, was magnificent. Costly and rare mirrors—known only in Venice, where they were just then invented and manufactured—in frames, stupendous from the massive carving and gilding—velvet hangings wrought in gold—silk and satin in profusion—pictures by famous artists—in fact, all that taste could plan and wealth attain, was lavishly bestowed upon the decoration of that saloon and the four adjoining ones.

Through these superb chambers, on the night in question, moved all the rank and fashion of Venice. Music, dancing, and, above all, gambling, occupied the attention of the guests. In Venice, at this period, the spirit of gambling existed in greater force than in any other city in Europe. Enormous sums were staked, won, and lost nightly, in the saloons of the Venetian nobility. Males and females equally indulged in that fatal and fascinating passion.

In the first and most gorgeous apartment, the chief occupa-

tion of the guests was conversation. Some reposed on ottomans in groups, others stood in pairs ; but all were occupied. Two signors stood somewhat apart from the rest in earnest conversation. One of them was our old acquaintance, Count Michaello Steno ; the other was the owner of the mansion, who was most elaborately and sumptuously dressed. In years, he appeared to be about fifty-seven. He was of the middle height, but no way remarkable in figure. At a single glance his features would be pronounced good, but a second look would convince the beholder that their expression was repulsive. Even in the midst of the many cringing parasites that surrounded him, there rested upon his features an air of scorn and pride. A restless expression also, at times, sat upon his countenance, as if his mind and thoughts were far from the scene before him.

"You seem extremely anxious, Steno," remarked Count Luigi, "about this Corsican exile ; but I can positively assure you we have nothing whatever to do with his disappearance. Is it not much more likely that he has been entrapped into the power of Genoa ? Their rulers would willingly pay a large sum for his person. But you were saying he was about to be united to the daughter of one of our wealthiest merchants, the Signor ——"

Passarini hesitated ; and had Count Steno raised his head at that moment, he would have perceived a strange expression on the Venetian's countenance.

"The Signor Alviano's daughter," interposed Steno ; "yes, it was a sad fatality, in sooth, a cruel blow to one so young and fair."

A gleam of satisfaction stole across the features of Count Luigi ; but he immediately replied—

"By St. Mark, Steno, you seem to think a girl's heart, once bestowed, is not to be recovered. But let her mingle among our young and gay cavaliers, and I will bet you her weight in silver she finds another heart to give away."

"I am no gambler, ount," responded Steno, somewhat coldly, "or I would double the bet with you. Agnes Alviano is ——"

"Save yourself a long and moral piece of eloquence upon this peerless maiden," interrupted Passarini, with a sarcastic laugh, "for I hear she is beautiful. And tell me, has not her father purchased the palace of Count Nicolo Pisani, who so unfortunately perished in the East ?"

"He has, and moved into it yesterday."

"The Signor Alviano ! how looks he after twenty years spent under the burning sun of Byzantium ? Bears he his years well, eh ?"

Steno was looking at the councillor as he asked the latter question ; and he somehow thought there was a strange expression in the keen eyes of the questioner.

"I believe," said Steno, not answering the question put, "you were never acquainted with the Signor Alviano."

"No ; I never had the pleasure of meeting the Signor Alviano," returned Count Luigi, speaking slowly and deliberately. "He had sailed for the East before my return to Venice. But, count," continued Passarini, "there is one thing I particularly wish to say to you, as I may not again to-night have the opportunity. You must use your influence with the Signor Alviano. You are aware of our system."

The councillor here spoke in a whisper.

"I shall send a secretary to the signor, who requires one in winding up his mercantile affairs. He shall be a person fully competent. Persuade the merchant to install him in that office ; otherwise, you know, we must establish a person in his household of a more objectionable character."

"Who is the man you speak of, count ?" demanded Steno, after a moment's pause.

"A very quiet, sensible, elderly man," carelessly returned the Venetian. "He served me several years ago ; and I had no fault to find with him. I do not think you ever saw him. His name is Tomaso Moncenego."

"Very well," returned Steno, turning away. "But, verily," and he muttered the last words between his teeth, "ours is a monstrous system. I begin, since my marriage, to lose all my ambitious speculations."

And Steno turned away.

Count Luigi Passarini stood looking after Count Steno, with a look of singular meaning.

"Ours is a monstrous system, eh ?" he repeated to himself. "*Benissimo !*"

With a bitter and suppressed laugh, he strolled into one of the gambling saloons ; and there, in less than an hour, threw away a sum that would have made ten miserable families happy for many a long day.

Time rolls on, whether spent in pleasure or in pain ; and gay and happy as the guests in the Palace Passarini appeared to be, at a late hour of the night, or rather morning, not a soul, save the count himself, remained within those splendid saloons.

The councillor stood with folded arms, gazing steadily into a magnificent mirror, which reached from floor to ceiling. The brilliant lights reflected his figure and features in strong relief. He looked keenly, and even anxiously, at his own

reflection ; he seemed to scan every feature, and his cold grey eyes, after a time, threw out a momentary gleam of satisfaction, as he muttered to himself—

“Yes, I am changed. Thirty years have done their work ; ay, much more than their allotted work. I am an old man to look at ; but here,” and he placed his hand upon his heart, “I am young. The fire is here, still burning as fierce as if thirty years were only as yesterday. The hour so patiently waited for is come at last.”

Touching a silver bell, a domestic entered.

“Tell Tomaso Moncenego to come hither.”

In a few moments the door opened, as if stealthily, and a man habited in black entered with the noiseless step of a well-bred cat, and with something of the manner of that cringing animal.

“Close the door,” said the count.

It was done.

“Now stand up and let me have a clear view of you, Mussato—or rather, for I forget myself—Tomaso Moncenego.”

The man obeyed. He was a tall, meagre figure, though not without an appearance of great muscular power. He had a cold and passionless face, with dull, leaden-coloured eyes. It might seem that his countenance could be little altered by expression ; yet that was far from the case.

“Stand a little more from under that shining light, Tomaso. Let me see if the thirty years gone by have altered you, so that even the mother that gave thee birth should doubt thy identity.”

And the count scanned earnestly the features and figure of the man who stood before him like a statue.

“Yes, you will do,” said the Venetian. “The fire of that eye is gone—quenched. Ha !” continued the count, “who could have imagined that cold, leaden eye could answer me so well ? Hatred and revenge are still, I see, to be read in their glance. So much the better—so much the better. I wronged you, Mussato. Prosperity and twenty years of repose have not extinguished that which should never cease to burn with a devouring flame.”

“My lord, I have that here,” and the stranger laid his hand upon his left shoulder, “which hourly reminds me of an oath never to be forgotten. Now is the time. Are your plans matured, my lord ? Or shall this —” and his hand rested on the handle of a poniard.

“Cospetto, man, that would be poor vengeance, after the lapse of so many years. If loss of life could have satisfied my burning thirst for revenge, my never dying hatred, twenty

years ago Bartholomco Alviano would have been food for worms. No, no, no ! Listen to me now, Mussato, and attend well to my instructions. Bartholomeo Alviano can never recognise, in the Count Luigi Passarini, lord of the rich land of Cerego, member of the Council of Ten : eh, Mussato, does that name make even you start ? In truth, it is a mighty power ; it crushes the innocent as well as the guilty ; the prince no less than the beggar. A modern Colossus, more mighty and destructive than the iron sceptre of a Nero or a Caligula. But I was saying, I fear not to be recognized. Even should we meet, he could never expect to see in me, the condemned, the outlawed, the fugitive."

The count paused ; his face flushed, and his whole manner was excited by his thoughts.

"Why," he continued, after striding across the saloon, and again stopping and fixing his gaze upon the unmoved countenance of his spy, "why does my memory thus for ever conjure up the scenes of long past years ? Power, wealth, dominion, all are mine ; yet all these cannot drive from my mind the cursed remembrance of the past, which haunts me, sleeping or waking. Give me a goblet of wine, Mussato."

The count threw himself into a chair, swallowed the wine, and, after a moment, spoke in a much less excited tone.

"Our victim," resumed he, "is at length within our power, after long years of patient waiting. All I ever feared was that death might remove him from my grasp. But no : he is here, in Venice, full of health ; possessing immense wealth, proud of a beauteous daughter, for whose hand half our young nobility already eagerly offer themselves. He lent large sums, too, to replenish our exhausted coffers ; and we propose to ennable this unknown outcast, for no one can discover whence he came. Baron Alviano ! ha ! ha ! ha !" laughed the Venetian, "an empty title, and a cheap return for his ostentatious liberality. Now, Mussato, what think you ? Would it not be a glorious revenge to strip him of his wealth, to rob him of his daughter, to banish him, as a condemned outlaw, from the territories of Venice for ever ; and then to whisper in the ears of this heart-stricken old man—penniless, childless, disgraced, stigmatised—'Andrea Passarini has thus repaid himself for the past ?'"

"Yes, my lord," answered the spy, seeing the count pause ; "that would be a revenge worthy of your excellency. But I claim the person of the merchant Alviano when banished from Venice. My account is to be balanced yet."

Again the eye of the villain changed the entire expression

of his apparently inanimate features ; for it actually glistened like the eye of the rattlesnake.

"Do as thou wilt, Mussato. He is thine when I am satisfied. Now, then, for the part you have to play at this moment. Alviano is at present in his own mansion. Take this letter ; and, the day after to-morrow, present yourself at the palace Pisani, or rather Alviano—for he has purchased it—when you will be appointed his secretary. I know your skill in counterfeiting any writing. That is one of the levers I intend to use. Let me see you once in every twenty-four hours, no matter what hour of the night. But it *must* be at night. This key, you know, admits you to the private staircase, leading to my sleeping chamber. Knock twice ; and I will admit you. Remember, only in the last hours of the night. Circumstances unlooked for have already favoured me. The disappearance of this Corsican Paoli, who was banished Venice, has given me a most powerful engine to work with. Have your eyes constantly about you ; let nothing escape you that passes within the boundaries of Alviano's mansion. I have said enough for the present. You may therefore retire. When installed as secretary let me see you."

Mussato bowed ; and, without a word, left the saloon. The count summoned his attendants ; the lights were extinguished, and the count retired to his chamber.

Not, surely, to sleep ; but with the thoughts of a fiend raging in his heart's core.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CAPTURE.

How frequently, when we think ourselves on the point of obtaining the object of our dearest wishes, suddenly, by some unforeseen event, the object is lost, and the heart is crushed by the overwhelming calamities that follow. Vain, indeed, are all our resolutions when opposed to the decrees, not of destiny, but of One who alone knows why or wherefore we are thus crushed, when believing ourselves most sure of felicity. So it was with Giacinto Paoli, who, with a light and happy heart, his thoughts full of the felicity before him, entered the light barge with six active oarsmen, to proceed to Scutari and execute the commission of the Signor Alviano. It is scarcely three miles to Scutari beyond the point from which he started.

The day was cold, bleak, and wintry ; and the scud flew along the opposite line of coast with great velocity, while a biting wind howled over the narrow waters of the Bosphorus.

Favoured by the breeze that blew off the shores of Byzantium, the barge, in much less than an hour, touched the beach at Scutari ; and the Corsican proceeded at once to the house of the Signor Negreti, leaving Pulini to amuse himself with strolling through the place. Two hours finished all that Paoli had to do with the Greek merchant. Notwithstanding the pressing arguments of the latter to defer his return till the next day—for the gale had increased to a tempest—Paoli only smiled, saying,

“Tis but crossing a canal.”

The Greek shook his head, and replied,—

“Nevertheless, the passage is a dangerous one in gales of wind.”

Shaking the merchant by the hand, Giacinto proceeded to the pier, where he had left the barge ; and in the way he met his squire, who observed that it blew a hurricane, and he doubted the possibility of the men pulling against such a head-wind.

“I have vowed,” responded Paoli, “never to sleep under any other roof than that which covers my betrothed, if possible.”

“St. Antony ! we can but try,” returned the stout-hearted squire, cheerfully. “We can pull a better oar than any of those rascally Greeks.”

Since the flight of the Grecian galley, at the battle of the Bosphorus, Pulini held the Greeks in sovereign contempt.

On reaching the mole the knight perceived that the wind blew in downright earnest. The water was driven off the surface like snowdrift ; and the short curling sea broke with noisy violence against the strong mole of Scutari. It was yet early in the day ; and Paoli, after casting a glance over the troubled waters, and the equally troubled sky, saw that to pull across was out of the question. But the barge was a fine boat ; and, ordering his men to step the masts and reef the sails, the wind having veered a point or two up the channel of the Bosphorus, he saw no great risk in making the opposite shore, a league or so below Pera. He could then easily reach Byzantium before night by crossing the ferry above Dolma Brachia.

It was not without evident reluctance that the Greek sailors obeyed. Proverbially timid, then as well as now, nothing but the known determination of the Corsican could have induced them to dream of crossing the straits in such a

gale. If anything will make a Greek incur a serious risk 'tis a bribe.

"Come, my men," said Paoli, taking the helm, "be alert, and there is a well-filled purse to divide amongst you."

Gold, gold, what will it not do! The sails were close reefed ; the sheets held steadily with one turn over the hook ; and, rounding the mole, the light but buoyant boat breasted, with some chance of success, the wild waves of the Thracian Bosphorus. A cheer broke from the hitherto silent lips of the numerous Greeks that thronged the mole to witness, as they firmly believed, the upsetting of the barge. But when the boat, skilfully handled, threw the white crest of the waves high over gunwale and mast, and steered a point or so off the wind, gliding rapidly and safely from the shore, a shout of approbation broke from the crowd.

On flew the barge, her masts and yards bending like reeds, and the sea flying over them in one continued sheet, while the astounded Greeks alternately called on their favourite saints or implored the Corsican to turn back. Paoli had no time to heed either their prayers or solicitations ; for, blinded by the spray, it was as much as he could do to keep the masts and sails from being torn out of the barge by the fierce and sudden gusts. The Corsican, however, succeeded in running the boat into a snug inlet some three miles below Pera.

"By the mass, signor," exclaimed Pulini, as he leaped ashore, and shook himself clear of as much water as possible, "if this is a hot climate in summer it beats our own island to nothing in the cold of winter."

"A smart walk will set our blood in circulation, Pulini," returned the knight, as he extricated his weighty sword from a locker in which he had placed it to keep it from the wet.

The men anchored their boat, and said they would sleep either in her or a village close at hand, and return to Byzantium in the morning.

The knight and his squire having inquired and received full instructions as to their path over the hill, from where the remainder of their route would be distinctly visible, set out at a rapid pace ; for their wet garments and the biting wind gave an impetus to their movements. As they proceeded across the hill, Paoli was struck by the beauty and richness of the land, even as seen in the depth of winter, and on a gloomy day.

"What a pity, signor," observed Pulini, "that this fine country should belong to such a cowardly and effeminate race as the Greeks."

"It is not at all unlikely," responded the Corsican, "but that

the land will change masters. The followers of the false prophet are making gigantic strides towards this last stronghold of the Roman Empire."

"The saints forbid! signor," piously ejaculated Pulini, "that these accursed revilers of the true faith should plant the crescent where the blessed cross now stands!"

"Amen!" seriously responded Paoli. "Petrarch, in his late letter to the Doge of Venice, says—'Unite with Genoa; and with fire and sword root out the perfidious Greek, and the vile heresy that creeps over that fair land.' But we may as well attempt to make the lion embrace the lamb, as those two greedy, perfidious republics unite for other purposes than the thirst of gold."

A fast walk of an hour brought our two Corsicans to the gates of Pera. The keen wind had dried their garments; and the rapid walk freely circulated their blood.

"It strikes me, signor, if we could have found a path over yonder hill, it would have been better than passing through this colony of our old enemies."

"I see no reason for any such precautions," replied our hero. "There are several days yet, or rather weeks, to the expiration of the allotted term. The Genoese, Catalans, and Venetians mingle amicably in the bazaars and magazines of Byzantium and Pera."

"*Per Bacco*, signor, we are neither Greek, Catalan, nor Venetian."

"Who is to know that, Pulini?" So saying, the knight and his squire passed through the gate of Pera, and entered that imposing and fast-increasing settlement of the Genoese. All the public places of this busy colony were thronged with traders from every port of the east and west then known. Knights in full mail—groups of soldiers and men-at-arms, intended for their settlements in the Black Sea—Greeks, Armenians, Persians, in their native costume—crowded and jostled through the streets and covered bazaars, which were filled with costly merchandise of every kind, and frequented by females, old and young, in their favourite head-dress (a long white veil over the head, and parted in the front). Altogether, though within an arrow's flight of Byzantium, the scene presented in Pera was totally different from anything that could meet the sight in the great city.

Traversing the great square, in which stood the strong fortress of the Governor, Paoli passed a group of loiterers, of whom some were in very handsome mail, and others richly habited in the Spanish costume, then much imitated by the Genoese. The powerful and striking figure of the Corsican

attracted their attention ; and Pulini, full of suspicion, watched their motions as they looked eagerly after his master. The squire even caught the words, "Commander of the Lion," spoken aloud by one of the group, as if in reply to a question.

"We are recognised, signor," said Pulini, as he rapidly followed his master. "I heard one of those Genoese in the chain-armour say you were the commander of the 'Lion.'"

"That's very possible, Pulini," returned our hero ; "but no consequence can result from their recognising us. They would now forfeit their honour by infringing the terms of the treaty."

"Forfeit their honour ! *Cospetto*, signor, when had a Genoese faith or honour to lose ? What says the proverb ?—'Men without faith—sea without fish—and women without shame.'"

Paoli laughed at the bitterness of his honest squire against their old enemies, and quickened his steps to please him. On reaching the gate on the side nearest Byzantium, Paoli demanded of the warder, who threw open the small wicket leading out on the drawbridge, the nearest road to the ferry.

"Have you come through the town, signor ?" demanded the warder ; "for if you have, you have increased your distance from the ferry by more than a mile. There is another gate which leads out in a direct line. However, you must take the path round yonder fort," pointing to one about a quarter of a mile distant on the side of a hill steep. "At the other side of that fort is a gate, called the East Gate. When you passed through the great square you might have reached that by a path not five hundred yards long."

Thanking the warder, Paoli and his squire proceeded along the path, which led through a small, but beautiful valley, now termed Dolma Boetia. Tradition states that through this valley the Turks drew their vessels in one night into the harbour of Byzantium, being unable to force the chain which defended its entrance. Paoli and his squire soon passed across the valley, and were ascending the hill to the fort, when Pulini, looking back, descried a body of armed men proceeding along the very path they had passed.

"By all the saints, signor, we are pursued !" exclaimed the squire, anxiously. "Let us pass on."

Paoli looked, and saw the men following, certainly ; but at a very easy pace.

"They may only be proceeding to some of the forts," suggested he ; "perhaps to this very one."

Our hero and Pulini were then beneath the walls of the fort ; the path turned sharp round it ; and the moment the knight and his squire did so they at once perceived they were betrayed. A score of men-at-arms, with their leader in full

mail, his visor closed, were drawn directly across, and completely blocked up the road.

“Curse on their faith and honour!” bitterly exclaimed Pulini, drawing his sword. “Better, my lord, to die than rot in their dungeons, or hang on their gibbets, as your noble sire was doomed to do.”

Paoli uttered not a word, but biting his lip with passion, till the blood flowed, he drew his heavy steel cutlass, and, advancing with a firm step, said, in a bold and fierce tone,—

“For what reason, signor, is our path obstructed in a time of peace, and in place of a proclaimed armistice?”

“I am a mere mercenary, signor,” replied the commander of the men-at-arms, “and am paid for obeying orders. My present duty is to place you, Signor Paoli, a prisoner in this fort; and you surely are not so insane as to resist the force before you, and a stronger one coming up behind you. Be wise, then, signor; give up your sword, and no insult or violence shall be offered you.”

“It has never been the custom of a Paoli to surrender his weapon to an enemy; especially to a perfidious one. Take it, if you can.”

Boiling with rage, and perfectly reckless of life (for once in the power of Genoa, he well knew if life should not at once be forfeited, liberty was gone for ever), had Paoli and his squire been cased in mail, many of the men-at-arms would have dearly rued the strife. As it was, placing their backs against the high wall of the fort, they defied every effort of the men to take them. Their commander, desperately wounded by a blow from the Corsican, lay senseless upon the bank; and so amazed at the strength and skill of Paoli were the Italians—for the men formed part of a troop of Condottieri from the Milanese in the pay of Genoa—that they hung back, till a shout from the band advancing up the hill roused them to greater exertion.

“Now then, my brave squire,” exclaimed Paoli, “cut through these dastards, and on for the ferry. Once in sight of any part of Byzantium, these villains dare not infringe the treaty.”

Again a man-at-arms was struck down mortally wounded—another—and Paoli broke through the rank easily; when a voice from the walls of the fort above, exclaimed,—

“Stand back, men!—a quarry from a cross-bow will cool that incarnate devil.”

“Twang went the steel bow, and the ill-starred Corsican staggered, for the bolt had lodged in his left side. His arm fell, from the agony of the wound, and two of the men rushed eagerly upon him. Rousing his last energies (for he thought himself mortally wounded), with a grasp of iron he seized the ill-fated Italian, and, lifting him from the ground, hurled him

over the steep precipice on one side of the path. But the next instant he fell prostrate and senseless upon the sod.

With a wild cry of agony, Pulini cast himself beside his beloved master. The men-at-arms, and those coming up the hill, stood aghast as they beheld their comrade hurled over the steep, and saw and heard his mailed body as it rolled and clanked against the sharp rocks that formed the cliff. The leader of the men had contrived to unclasp his helmet, and sat upright, with blood-stained features, gazing, bewildered, upon the scene of the late strife.

“Is the knight dead, Pietro ?” he demanded, in a weak, but anxious voice. “Fore God, he is the best man I ever yet saw handle a sword. I bear him no malice, though, *cospetto*, he has left an ugly mark on my skull, despite my Milan steel. Holy Paul ! had he been in knightly harness, and that stout squire of his in good mail, we should have rued this day’s job. But is he dead ?”

“I wish he had died twenty years ago,” replied one of the men. “Curse him, he has slain outright my brother Nicolo. His squire there is handling him as gently as a nurse would a bantling. What’s to be done now ?”

In the meantime the men, with a leader whose armour betokened higher rank than the other, and whose great height and bulk caused him to ascend the steep path slowly and painfully, reached the spot. The leader’s visor was down ; and, after puffing and blowing for a moment or so, he said, speaking to the Milanese,—

“Why, how the devil is this, Master Matteo ? Here has been some pretty fighting. Four of you looking as dead as pickled tunney ; some half-dozen of you examining your wounds ; and one gone exploring over the cliff, which he never will ascend again. And, *Santa Madonna !* worse than all, the Corsican is dead, I fear.”

He then approached the place where the distracted Pulini was staunching the wound in the side of his master as well as he could with the means at hand.

“Why, curse it, how is this !” angrily exclaimed the bulky commander, who was no other than Achilles Furiani. “He has been struck down by a bolt from a cross-bow. What dastard did this ?”

“I did it,” exclaimed a tall, strong man, in the dress of a crossbow-man. “I did it by order of one more my master than you, Signor Furiani. He would have slain half those fellows,” he added, “ay, and escaped before you could have mounted this hill ; and the commander of Galata, who was beside me on yonder wall, told me to shoot, if I shot him dead.”

"Humph!" muttered Achilles, "like him—cursed cowardly way of bringing down a brave man, fighting against fifteen of you, and unarmed too. However, what's done can't be undone. Pick him up, and carry him to the chamber intended for his prison. Send for the leech. If he's dead, why there's no help for it. If he lives, which I trust he will, though perhaps it is only to be hung as a rebel in the end, I shall have done all I can do, on the score of humanity, to a brave man. Now," added Achilles, speaking to himself, "let me see what Campaldino says for his share in this transaction."

In a chamber of the fort Furiani found Campaldino pacing backward and forward in an agitated manner.

"So he is dead!" he exclaimed, as soon as he beheld Achilles.

"He may, or he may not," returned the lieutenant; "the surgeon will decide that. He is hit deuced hard; and a cursed shame it was to bring down a brave knight with a cross-bow, like a mad dog."

"Why, what ails the man?" exclaimed Campaldino, with a scornful laugh. "Since when has your conscience pricked you so hard? When Paoli was left to the mercy of Montoni's dagger, you never troubled your head about how he was struck down. And now, when on the very point of escaping, and after actually slaying three or four of our men-at-arms, you want to quarrel with me for bringing him down with an honest bow-shot."

"Oh! to the devil with such honest shots, say I. By the mass, it's no joke, an ounce of iron sent into you at ten paces. I never saw the man before, and therefore did not bestow a thought upon him. But, *corpo di mondo!* a finer looking fellow cannot exist. Then, just to see him make play, without defensive armour of any kind, against a whole score of men-at-arms; and, even when shot to death, take up that unlucky devil, Spolato, and pitch him like a lobster over the cliff. 'Fore God, it warms one's heart towards such a man."

A boisterous laugh of contempt was all the answer Campaldino deigned to give.

"Well, you may laugh, Andrea; but it won't alter the case one way or another. Dead or alive, he now belongs to the governor of Pera; so I suppose all we shall pocket by the transaction is the disgrace of not being able to take a knight and his squire with a score of men-at-arms, without getting a scurvy rascal of a bow-man to shoot him."

"You are enough to drive one mad with your cursed nonsense, Furiani. What else was to be done? How else was he to be taken? When I saw him pass through the square, and

felt him, too, in the battle on the Bosphorus, I was forced to let the governor know ; claiming half the reward, however. The governor, who has less scruple even than ourselves, was intensely anxious to secure his person ; for, you must know, he is the very man Paoli's father drove out of Corsica, and stripped of all his hard-earned treasure, plundered from the Corsican lords. I was told to take a score of men-at-arms, and go out by the east gate, and cut him off before he could possibly be seen by the Greeks on the opposite side ; so that the capture might be kept secret. I told you to hurry after him with four of our men, and secure him before he could reach the fort ; and then I would have told the governor he had crossed by a boat from Galata. But you are so cursed slow in your movements, that he reached the fort before you ; and the taking of him being entrusted by the governor to that Italian mercenary, I did not interfere till I saw that he actually would have cut his way through the men and got away. It was not likely, then, that I would let the man that slew my father, and struck my eye out, escape when a Bowman stood at my elbow."

"And what does the governor intend doing with him, supposing he should live ?"

"Send him by the next fleet that arrives to Genoa, where he will linger out the residue of his days in a state prison. Why, man ! it was a most cursed chance our not capturing him without the governor's knowledge. His value is doubled since the late news from Genoa."

"*Diavoli !* And what news is that ?" demanded Achilles.

"I had not time to inform you," returned Andrea Campaldino ; "for the despatches only reached the governor a few hours before the Corsican happened to pass through the square. It appears by these despatches that Corsica has again revolted ; and, singular to say, General Paoli, who, it was believed, had been executed by my father, and for which supposed deed he incurred the vengeance of the younger Paoli—"

Campaldino did not finish his sentence, for Furiani, who stared with amazement at his comrade, exclaimed—

"What are you talking about ? I can't understand these plots and counter-plots. Who the devil is General Paoli ? I always understood your respectable and much regretted father, when he got possession of Corte, hung a General Paoli, with several other signors. And now you tell me—he's alive. Did he hang General Paoli ?"

"No !" sulkily returned Campaldino, "he did not. I confess I thought at the time my father's policy was a crooked

one. He caused it to be understood that he executed General Paoli and others ; thinking to strike a terrible blow to the rebels, and end the war, which it certainly did, and cost him his life. The other signors *were* executed ; and one was dressed, purposely, in the armour of the general. But, in reality, the Corsican leader was sent secretly to Genoa and confined in the state prison, to be used hereafter, if necessary, to intimidate the Corsicans. But, lo and behold, when wanting, it was discovered he had by some unaccountable means escaped. Now, no doubt, he will contrive to make his way to Corsica ; and, in the present state of the republic, on the point of a fresh war with Venice and a rupture with France, the Corsicans will have the best of it."

" Well, by the immortal gods, Andrea," exclaimed Furiani, " you have completely bewildered me ; especially as we are talking without a flask of wine to make what you are saying intelligible. All I can make out is that General Paoli was dead, but is now alive ; was thought to be hung, and was not hung ; that his son was alive an hour ago, but is now either dead or likely to die ; and that if he lives he is likely to be hung ; and, if not hung, is likely to die in prison. Now, if that's not what our leech calls a compound mixture, I do not know what is. But let us go down to the old tower, and pass the remainder of the evening brightening our ideas with Cyprus, and hearing what that rascal, Montoni, says. He has bought the craft, you say, and the sooner we get out of this place the better. We have nothing further to do with the poor *diavolo* in the chamber above ; as you passed him over to the governor. Pray shall you finger any cash for betraying him into his power ? "

" He has promised me half the sum he gets on his reaching Genoa," replied the commander of Galata.

" Ha ! *promised*," muttered Achilles, " they are easily managed, those promises, by the mass ! Had I lived all my life on promises, by St. Antony, I should'nt have so goodly a carcass to boast of now."

" If you had less carcass and more brains, *amico*," returned Campaldino, " we had entrapped that Corsican ourselves. You took as much time to mount that cursed hill as would take another man a league of ground."

" As if it was nothing," muttered Furiani, " for a man of my bulk, cased in mail, after making a hearty dinner, and finishing half-a-dozen goodly flasks, to mount a hill as perpendicular, by Jove, as the ramparts of Pera ! But here's you man, Nicolo."

" How is the prisoner now ? Is he dead ? " demanded Campaldino of the man who entered the room.

"No, signor," replied the man, "neither is he likely to die. The leech, who has taken out the bolt, says he'll be nothing the worse in a month's time. He's quite sensible now. Matteo has got an ugly knock over the head. He says the Corsican hits cursed hard; for his Milan steel casque is sliced like a gourd; and as to the other men, it's frightful to look at the way they're carved."

"*Corpo di mondo!*" ejaculated Furiani; "and yet you wanted me to pursue him with the four men I had with me, without waiting to go back to the tower for my armour."

"It's no use talking now," interposed Campaldino. "Let us go; I wish to see Montoni as soon as possible. Perhaps his brain is more fertile. We might contrive to get him into our power yet."

"To the devil with plots, say I," grumbled Achilles, as he followed his commander.

Leaving the fort, the two confederates took their way to the tower of Galata.

CHAPTER XXVII.

R E T R O S P E C T I O N .

WE must now request our readers to pass with us over the space of two years from the period of Paoli's captivity.

The time was near sunset; and the spot to which we beg our readers to follow us is Puelfo, a very insignificant village on the borders of the Adriatic, and not more than a league from Chiozzi: it was, however, without the Dogada.

Two travellers, well mounted, one a tall powerful individual, in a plain but polished suit of mail—the other a stout, broad-shouldered man of middle age, and habited in the armour of a squire.

These travellers were no other than Giacinto Paoli and his attendant, Pulini. The road to the village—if the stony beach could be called a road—ran along the then smooth waters of the Adriatic. The hamlet itself possessed but one venta of any kind, and that a remarkably poor one; but the place was selected by our hero for two reasons: first, it was without the Dogada of Venice; for Paoli's term of exile from that republic still wanted four months of terminating; and he by no means felt inclined to trust that jealous republic, even if it wanted but four days. The second reason why he selected the village of Puelfo for a resting-place, after a very long and hazardous journey, was that he could dispatch a

messenger from thence, who could go and return the same day.

Having reached the door of the venta, he was assured by the astonished padrone, who certainly had never been visited by such guests before, that he could afford the horses the best of shelter (which meant that they might sleep under the shelter of a hedge in the one field he possessed), and that, as to themselves, they had only to ask and to have. Paoli was therefore installed in a small but very clean chamber, and the repast provided for him was fish, and fish only. But our hero and his squire were not men who troubled themselves as to the splendour of their lodgings or the fare put before them.

Having satisfied a very good appetite with the spoils of the sea under their windows, and washed it down with a bottle or two of very passable wine, Paoli sent for the *padrone de casa*; and, on that individual making his appearance, he requested him to procure an intelligent man, to send to Venice with letters, on the earliest hour possible in the morning.

Pulini himself would have gone; but for several reasons they both thought it better to employ a stranger.

"You could not, signor," responded the padrone, "have applied for a messenger at a more fortunate moment. My son, Pietro, who is (though I ought not to praise my own flesh and blood) as clever a youth as any within ten leagues of this" (in which distance the worthy landlord took in the whole Dogada). "He sails at sunrise to-morrow, signor, with a cargo of fish to Venice," continued the host; "and, please the blessed Saints, will be back before sunset, as he knows the navigation of the lagunes and of the channel of Chiozzi. He gets there and back in all weathers."

"That will answer exactly," returned our hero. "Send your son to me; he shall be well paid. Attention to my messages will give more profit than his cargo of fish."

Paoli was pleased with the appearance and manner of the youth—a fine, hardy, open-featured young man. Giving him a packet of letters prepared at the last town he had slept at, and carefully inclosed in a strong leather case, he told him that the packet was to be delivered at the mansion of the Marchese Tiepolo. Paoli also gave Pietro a single letter to be left at the mansion of Count Michaello Steno. In both cases Pietro was to wait for an answer, even if he should be detained till the following day. To these instructions our hero added the gift of a handful of silver to pay expenses.

The youth, rejoiced at being employed by so handsome and generous a signor, had not patience to wait the rising sun, but put to sea with his two comrades an hour before dawn.

While Pietro Anino is making the best of his way through the intricate channel of Chiozzi, we will very briefly fill up the gap left in our tale by the passing of two years.

The incidents which occurred to our hero during those two years were of the most eventful kind, and his trials severe. At the expiration of three months after his capture by order of the Governor of Péra, he recovered from the dangerous wound he had received ; but it was not till half a year had been endured by him in hopeless captivity, that he was unexpectedly embarked in a war galley bound to Genoa, with a large body of troops returning from a Genoese settlement in the Black Sea. Violent and boisterous weather detained this vessel two months in the Archipelago. Again, off the coast of Sicily, a furious gale drove the voyagers out of their course ; and as the galley was finally dismasted and helpless, the soldiers mutinied, broke open the stores, and in the confusion which ensued the vessel was driven by the raging tempest upon the most dangerous part of the coast of the island of Sardinia.

In the terror of their approaching destruction, Paoli and his squire forced their way on deck scarcely half an hour before the vessel struck on a reef about five hundred yards from the main land. Both of them, being bold and powerful swimmers from their childhood, cast off their upper garments and threw themselves without hesitation into the boiling surf that raged round the barque, every sea that swept over her deck threatening to dash her into countless pieces.

Maddened by wine and terror, scarcely a soul reached the shore alive out of two hundred ; but Paoli and his squire, watching their opportunity, and exerting their utmost powers, though severely bruised and cut, succeeded in landing on a range of flat rock, and finally clambered out of reach of the devouring waves that lashed and foamed over that iron-bound coast.

After this most providential and unlooked-for escape from bondage, Paoli and his companion made their way to Detrano, the nearest town to that part of the coast where the galley was wrecked. They were in a distressing dilemma, having neither garments, money, nor any article of value. But no sooner were the inhabitants of Detrano aware that they were Corsicans than they conducted them to the mansion of their pastor, who received them with the greatest kindness, and on learning the name of his guest redoubled his offers of assistance. "For," said he, "you are not perhaps aware that your gallant countrymen, under Counts Gaffieri, Sampiero, and other seigneurs of name and station, are carrying on a vigorous war against the Genoese ; and from the last reports I learn that they have

taken Bonifaccio, Ajaccio, and several other fortified places of note."

Paoli was electrified and Pulini half frantic with joy. Ardently as our hero longed to proceed to Venice to recover his betrothed, his beloved country occupied his first thoughts, and he embarked the very next day in a fishing boat. Passing through the numerous islands that lie scattered amid the narrow strait that divides the two islands, he reached Bonifaccio in safety. The town was strongly garrisoned under the command of an officer who knew Paoli well.

The intelligence of his return spread over the town and adjacent country like wildfire. Hundreds that had before hesitated flew to arms. "Paoli, the deliverer, is come!" shouted they. At the expiration of ten days from his arrival, he left Bonifaccio, at the head of eight hundred well-armed men, to join the Count Sampiero, who was besieging his native fortress and town of La Rocca.

The amazement and joy of the young Count was great when he beheld his lost friend at the head of the party advancing to his relief. La Rocca was stormed, and taken the following day; and the news of Paoli's return, still flying through the country, had an electrifying effect. Every hour brought in parties of men, indifferently armed, it is true, but enthusiastic in the cause they were prepared to fight and die for.

After a week's delay for arms, Paoli, at the head of a considerable force, advanced against Bona, one of the largest arsenals for arms which the Genoese possessed. This fortress, after a desperate and sanguinary struggle, surrendered. Messengers shortly after arrived, and brought the intelligence that the Count Gaffieri was advancing to meet and join forces with Paoli, in order to lay siege to Corte, the strongest fortress, and the capital town of the island.

Paoli received the old and beloved friend of his father with a warm and filial embrace, at once tendering him the command of their united forces.

"No, no," exclaimed Gaffieri, with tears in his eyes, in memory of his lost friend, "under a Paoli I fought for years, and no other, while one of that noble name remains, shall lead the sons of Corsica to freedom."

And well did our hero sustain the honour conferred upon him. Success attended him everywhere. Corte fell after a month's siege. Then all the forts on the east coast were surrendered into his hands; and after three months more of desperate struggle, the cities of Bastia, San Fiorenzo, and Ajaccio (which had been retaken), alone remained to the Genoese.

Paoli was advancing upon Bastia, when intelligence reached him by a carrick which put into the port of Mariana that the great Genoese fleet under Grimaldi had sustained a most ruinous defeat off Locria, in Sardinia, from the Venetian fleet led by Pisani; and that Grimaldi had returned to Genoa, where the greatest consternation prevailed.

This was inspiring intelligence for the sons of Freedom, while to the garrison of Bastia it was a death-blow; for they had looked to the fleet of Grimaldi for reinforcements after he should have beaten the Venetians.

Paoli next invested Bastia, when one morning Pulini rushed into his tent like one deprived of his senses. During several moments he was unable to utter a syllable. At length the words burst from his lips—

“Your father is alive!”

Paoli sprang upon his feet, and the blood rushed to his face and temples, as he grasped the arms of his squire with a force that brought tears to his eyes.

“True, signor, as I live!” gasped the squire. “The man is without who brought the intelligence. St. Antonio! what a grasp you took of my arm! The general landed four days ago in the Gulph of San Fiorenzo. All I can learn of the man is that he saw him land from a small tartana—heard the crowd that soon assembled around him rend the air with shouts of ‘Paoli, our chief, for ever!’ Wishing to be the very first to carry the intelligence the man started on the instant, travelled all the night, and reached the camp this moment.”

Paoli hardly breathed; his heart beat violently; joy overpowered him.

“Take this purse to the man, and tell him, for the news he has brought me, if the Almighty continues to prosper our cause, and our country becomes free, twenty of the best acres on the lands of Paoli are his for ever. Now hasten, Pulini, and get a couple of our stout horses. I will start this instant for San Fiorenzo.”

We need not describe the meeting of a father and son so devotedly attached; nor will we pause at this period of our tale to relate the extraordinary circumstances that caused a belief that the general had been executed by the Genoese commander Campaldino; nor his adventures in escaping from the prisons of Genoa.

In six months from that period not a Genoese remained in Corsica. The whole island was one scene of wild enthusiasm.

Leaving his father (after relating to him the whole of his adventures, and his betrothment to the Signor Alviano’s

daughter) to regulate the future government of Corsica, and to recall those influential seigneurs who had exiled themselves, and many of whom resided in the Roman states, Giacinto sailed from Bastia in a fine zebec, which was to return after landing him at Pisa, with as much arms and armour as could be purchased there; for which Giacinto possessed sufficient funds, having, when in the East, lodged whatever ransom money he had received for his prizes with the partner of the Pisan bankers residing in Byzantium. On reaching Pisa our hero, still accompanied by his devoted squire, purchased armour and horses, and, after a long and hazardous journey, reached the little venta at Puelfo; to which place we shall now return, having been as brief as possible in the recital of incidents most important in themselves, but needless to detail at large, especially as the events before us are more than sufficient to fill our allotted space.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE GONDOLIER.

OUR hero awaited the return of the messenger with intense anxiety. It is very strange, but true, that a presentiment of evil about to befall us sometimes oppresses the mind with wonderful power.

The whole of that day Paoli could not divest his mind from dwelling upon the gloomy side of things. He dreaded he knew not what. A thousand dismal thoughts haunted his brain, leaving him bewildered and miserable. In vain Pulini, whose spirits were completely restored by the miraculous return to his native land of General Paoli, and by the emancipation of his beloved country from the hated yoke of Genoa, strove to cheer his master.

“What evil could happen?” urged the squire. “You know they reached Venice in safety. That lucky meeting with the captain of the galley which conveyed the Signor Alviano and his daughter from Byzantium to Venice relieved your mind from a load of anxiety; and now, when almost within bow-shot of all you so ardently long for, you permit despondency to gain complete dominion over you?”

“I have suffered so much,” replied our hero, “and received such shocks of misfortune when least expected, that, in fact, my worthy friend, I cannot master my thoughts. Two years have elapsed since I parted from my betrothed. What may not two years have done in such an abode as Venice?”

While the knight and his squire, thus conversing, were walking along the borders of the Adriatic, and looking anxiously

towards Chiozzi, they beheld, near sunset, a sail leave the channel of the Lagunes and steer for where they stood. It was the light bark of the fisherman ; and before half an hour had elapsed he jumped upon the beach. At a single glance Giacinto saw that all was not right: the youth came towards him with a disappointed look, and said—

“ I am sorry, signor, to say that I have not been a fortunate messenger.”

Then, taking from his vest the letters given him by our ero, he returned them, saying—

“ Signor, there are no such noblemen now residing in Venice.”

Giacinto stood like one electrified. For an instant he gazed upon the really anxious messenger with a distracted look, and then ejaculated, repeating the words of the fisherman—

“ No such noblemen now residing in Venice ? Do I hear you aright ? ”

“ Such, in *vero*, signor, I was told, after spending four hours in diligent search, till at length a tall personage masked— ”

“ Ah, curse to their masking ! ” interposed Pulini.

“ And wrapped in a long sable mantle,” continued the youth, “ having probably overheard my inquiries, laid his hand upon my shoulder, saying, ‘ *Amico*, be wise, and ask no more questions concerning persons who no longer reside within this city. Take yourself out of Venice, for trust me, if you do not, the air of this place will disagree with you.’ I stared, rather startled, signor, after this black-looking person, who pressed my shoulder hard as he passed on ; and finding it useless to inquire further, I returned.”

Paoli made no remark ; but his squire, who knew his master well, guessed his thoughts and intenti ns. After a moment's silence, he said, calmly—

“ Can you take us, with the early dawn, to Venice, Pietro ? You shall be well rewarded and incur no risk, as you can put us on board the first gondola you meet after entering the lagune.”

“ I shall be happy to serve you, signor,” replied the youth, “ in any way, risk or no risk. I regret my ill success, because I see it troubles you ; but my boat and myself are at your service at any hour.”

Pulini made no attempt whatever to dissuade his master from the dangerous project he intended. He simply remarked that if he thought he could find out the mystery of the total disappearance of two noble familics he might do so with much less danger.

“ No,” replied Paoli, “ my mind cannot bear the suspense

of waiting. Besides, in truth, I should have gone to Venice at first without any hesitation ; but I wished not to alarm the Signor Alviano or his daughter by doing that which they would consider rash and unnecessary. As to risk I see very little. It is carnival time ; and we can keep ourselves masked, and take up our abode in the Locanda—the Dalmatian Arms—which is in a very retired part of the city. You may remember the landlord. It was he who recommended Juliano the gondolier to us. Lodging with him, we can make every necessary inquiry without attracting attention. I fear some fearful tragedy has been perpetrated in that city of tyrants, spies, and assassins."

Leaving their horses, and the chief part of their arms, under the care of their host, Paoli and his squire embarked at sunrise. It was a splendid morning ; and a light breeze, just sufficient to fill the lofty and picturesque latine sail from the westward brought them rapidly into the Straits of Chiozzi. At that period, the intricate channels leading into the waters encircling Venice were neither buoyed nor marked, as at the present day, by immense poles. The safety of Venice lay in the impossibility of vessels, without Venetian pilots, navigating the innumerable and intricate channels.

Passing the Island of Brondolo, which lies directly in front of the town of Chiozzi, they entered what was then termed the sixth channel, which lies at the southern extremity of the Palestrina. This entrance required great skill to navigate, for innumerable banks are thrown up by the deposits of the rivers Brenta and Adige. With a leading wind, however, Pietro skilfully effected his passage, and then entered the one long canal, or channel, which led direct to Venice, distant some twenty miles. Within the vast lagune the water was like a mirror, though a fine breeze flew over its surface ; but its extreme shallowness, except in the canal, left the sea as tranquil as a fish-pond.

As they approached Venice, the appearance of which, rising from the very bosom of the deep, had a most singular and beautiful effect, Pulini suddenly remarked—

“Signor, we have neither masks or mantles.”

Paoli had not bestowed a thought upon those matters, so fixed were his ideas upon one subject alone. Pietro, who was steering the craft, and heard the remark, immediately said—

“It will be better, then, signor, if you do not wish to go ashore without them, that I cast anchor near the mouth of the Grand Canal. You can remain beneath the awning I will

put up, while I can call a gondola, and bring back the articles wanted in less than an hour."

This, notwithstanding his impatience, Giacinto considered the best plan.

It was yet early in the day when they let go their anchor and hailed a passing gondola. They had sailed the six-and-twenty miles in four hours, the wind being favourable and the water smooth.

Pietro, being furnished with money, was desired to purchase two plain brown mantles and masks, such as were commonly worn by wealthy citizens during carnival. In an hour, or little more, the young man returned with the articles. Putting them on, and placing a handsome reward in the hands of the young fisherman, the knight and his squire stepped within the awning of the gondola, and bade the youth farewell, telling him to take care of the horses, and keep the armour from rust or stain.

"Where to, signors ?" asked the gondolier, resting upon his long and slender oar, while his assistant used another in the extreme bow of the boat.

"The Dalmatian Arms, if the house is still in existence," replied our hero.

"That it is, signor," rejoined the man ; "and a very snug and quiet inn it is."

Although Paoli ardently desired to ask many a question from the gondolier, he refrained. After winding through the several canals, the boat landed them at the steps of the narrow causeway leading to the Dalmatian Arms, which was by no means a fortunate title for an albergo at that period, as Venice having just lost all claims to Dalmatia, any mention of that country was extremely offensive to the rulers of Venice. Nevertheless, the worthy signor, Mino Servite, the host of the Dalmatian Arms, had lived under that sign in peace and prosperity for twenty years, and was therefore very reluctant to change it, though strongly advised to do so.

The Signor Servite was a fat, short, indolent, but very honest, landlord—never in any way troubling himself with the concerns of his guests, excepting as regarded their lodging and fare ; and then their bill, which, to do him justice, was always moderate.

When the knight and his squire entered the locanda, carrying a small leathern mail, containing a few necessaries, the host arose, and demanded, without remarking that they still retained their masks—which was somewhat unusual—what he could do to serve them. Giacinto requested two private

chambers entirely to themselves, if they could be had, as it was his intention to remain some days.

"You can, signors," replied Servite, "at this moment have half-a-dozen, as the only inmates residing in my locanda are a Parmese Jew (a dealer in jewellery), and two Lombard packmen."

He then showed the way into a very neat and comfortable sitting-room, with two bedrooms leading from it.

"If these will do, signors, they are at your service, and perfectly private."

Paoli threw off his cloak and mask, saying they would do extremely well.

"And now, signors," continued the landlord, after casting a troubled and somewhat anxious glance upon the fine features of the Corsican, which seemed to throw the worthy host into a maze of thought, "you seem to have arrived from a distance. What shall I order to be prepared for you?"

And again he looked in the face of his guest, and also into that of Pulini, with a very thoughtful expression.

"I will leave our fare entirely to yourself, Signor Servite," replied Giacinto; "but there is one question I would fain ask you. Two or three years ago, you had, I think, a relation, or, at least, a connection of some kind, following the occupation of a gondolier." The landlord started, and even changed colour. "His name," continued the Corsican, "was Juliano Verbano. Is he still in Venice?"

"Body of all the Saints!" exclaimed the host, casting a look round the chamber, and hastily closing the door, "you are the lost Signor Paoli, about whom Juliano has been moaning and grieving these two years back. *Santa Madonna!*" he continued, rubbing his fat hands together in evident delight! "but the poor boy will go distracted with joy. You are the Signor Paoli, are you not? I guessed it, signor, the moment I saw your figure and face. Juliano has so often described you and talked of you that I saw you myself a hundred times in my dreams. I know all about you. You are quite safe here."

Paoli now repeated his question—

"Is Juliano, the gondolier, still in Venice?"

"Cossetto, signor, he lives in this house—sleeps and eats here. Two hours ago he was here, and will be at home again at sunset. Oh, how the poor boy will leap for joy!"

Determined to wait for the return of Juliano, Paoli wisely refrained from asking any more questions of his host, being alarmed at the volubility of his tongue. He therefore requested the Signor Servite to prepare a meal for him and his

companion, as they had eaten nothing since morning ; not to utter his name to any human being, and to send in Juliano the moment he arrived.

“I am silent, signor, as the grave.”

So saying, the landlord hurried out to prepare a repast worthy of his distinguished guest, for such he considered the Corsican.

“Though that man,” remarked Pulini, “is loquacious, you may rely upon his integrity ; for I have heard Juliano speak much in favour of his kindness of heart and generosity to him when he first came to Venice.”

Our hero waited with intense anxiety the arrival of Juliano. Those only can judge of the sensations arising from deep mental perplexity who have experienced them.

At length, a quick, light foot was heard in the passage. The door opened, and Juliano, the gondolier, entered the room. With a joyful exclamation, and delight beaming in every feature of his honest countenance, Juliano pressed the hand frankly held out to him by Paoli, who had always felt interested in the youth from the first time he had employed him. Pulini shook him repeatedly and heartily by the hand ; and for some moments, from various emotions, all three remained silent.

“I have much to ask of you, Juliano,” began Paoli, after pacing the chamber two or three times to calm his own agitation. “Sit down. Nay, I insist on your doing so. There is wine. When you regain composure, let me know every event that has occurred since the hour I was banished from Venice. I mean all events connected with those families so dear to me. One question I will, however, hazard. The Marchese Tiepolo, I understand, is no longer in Venice ; neither is Count Steno. You must have known the Signor Alviano and his daughter. Have they also left this ill-starred city ?”

Juliano looked sadly down, as he replied—

“Alas, signor, they have disappeared ; nor is it possible to conjecture how or whither they have gone.”

“I thought so,” calmly said Paoli, while Pulini looked stupefied. “Now then, Juliano, I will listen to you.”

“I will tell you all I know, and all I have seen, signor,” returned the gondolier ; “and perhaps I may be able to throw some light upon the strange events that have taken place since you left Venice.”

“Thou mayest glory, oh Venice ! in thy power and vast wealth, in thy firmness, in the vigilance of thy projects ; but thy shameless perfidy, thy gloomy tranquillity, thy mysterious tyranny, convert thy people into trembling slaves.”

Such were the thoughts of Paoli, as he listened to the gondolier's narrative, given in a simple manner.

"After your departure, signor," began Juliano, "things went on as usual in the Palace Tiepolo. In truth, we were all, from the Marchese and his family, to the humble gondolier, much cast down by the singular and unjust sentence passed upon you, signor, by the council. The ladies went out but seldom ; and very few parties of any kind took place in the palace. At length news arrived that you had reached the fleet, and had sailed : very shortly after the Lady Julia was married to the Count Steno, and they departed for the Roman States for a short period. The Lady Paulina felt sadly depressed at the temporary loss of her sister. I was now scarcely ever called on to take the family out upon the lagune. So passed several months.

"At length, letters arrived from Byzantium. We heard of your success, and of the prizes you had taken in the famous battle on the Bosphorus. Your intended marriage with the daughter of Signor Alviano also transpired. My knowledge of the events I am now relating to you, signor, is not gathered from the idle chattering of the marchese's domestics, but comes chiefly from the marchese himself. I frequently took the marchese to his villa on the island ; and, during the passage, he conversed freely with me, knowing how deeply interested I felt in all concerning you, signor.

"The Signor Alviano and his daughter, to the great joy of the Lady Paulina, arrived in Venice ; and, shortly after, the signor purchased the palace Pisani. His daughter, the Lady Agnes, appeared in very delicate health, and in very low spirits. I was now often employed in taking the ladies out on fine days on the lagune, and often to the villa of the Marchese Tiepolo. I add, with pride, signor, that I became a favourite of the Lady Agnes, and of her father, who would converse with me an hour at a time concerning you, asking many questions, and wishing to discover whether you had any secret enemy in Venice.

"Time rolled on, and at length I was established as the gondolier of the Lady Agnes, and was provided with a chamber in the court of her noble father's mansion. Shortly afterwards I observed a great and singular change take place in the three families to whom I was most devotedly attached : I mean the families of Tiepolo, Alviano, and Count Steno. The latter was, in truth, greatly altered. From being of a gay and sprightly temper, he suddenly grew thoughtful, reserved, and oftentimes gloomy. The very aspect of Venice seemed changed. Strange rumours were afloat. Dalmatia was lost to the State.

Reports got abroad that there was treason to the State in high quarters.

Some time before this period I had begun to remark a person in the establishment of Signor Alviano, who held the situation of secretary. This man's name was Thomaso Mocenego. I cannot say precisely why I began to notice this man ; but I did so ; and the feeling grew upon me. He was of middle age, quiet and civil in his deportment and manner ; but his look—his dull, leaden look—seemed ominous. I knew not how it was ; but when my eyes chanced to rest on this man's face, a kind of chill came over me, at which I tried to laugh, but I could not shake it off.

“One morning, going with some packages from the Signora Alviano to the Lady Paulina, I met the old major-domo, a domestic attached for years to the marchese. He was greatly agitated, and calling me aside, he said : ‘The Count and Countess Steno have quitted Venice.’ Then, lowering his voice, he added, ‘and for ever.’ He now hurried away, shaking his head, and muttering indistinct sentences to himself.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE GONDOLIER'S NARRATIVE.

“I STOOD petrified and uneasy,” continued Juliano, “looking after the old man, when the marchese himself crossed the hall. Seeing me he turned round, and, taking a letter from his vest, desired me to give it, as soon as I returned, to the Signor Alviano. I remarked that he looked very pale, and that his manner was agitated. I returned home in dismay. Doleful thoughts took possession of my mind ; and the remainder of that day was passed in anxious conjectures. At night, it came on suddenly to blow a violent gale. I was roused by the fierce gusts that roared through the colonnades beneath my window ; and recollecting that I had left the two gondolas without protecting fenders, I jumped up, dressed hastily, and went out to the boats, which were rubbing violently against the piles. Having secured them, I was returning, in the intense darkness of the night, through the colonnade that runs on one side of the Pisani palace, when I heard a key turned in the lock of a private portal leading into the mansion of the Signor Alviano. Startled, for it was too late an hour for any of the domestics to be up—and besides this was not a door used by the inmates of the palace—I stood still, sheltered behind a pillar. A faint light was on the space before the entrance ; and after the door was opened I saw a figure come forth, closely muffled in a

mantle. In turning to lock the door, the violent wind blew back the cloak from the face of the individual wrapped in it : my mind somehow felt satisfied, before that circumstance, that in the person before me I beheld Tomaso Moeenego. The little light there was came direct between the two columns and fell upon the stranger's face. I was right. I saw the features clear enough. Tightening his mantle about him, and covering his face, Tomaso proceeded out upon the narrow causeway running along the whole border of the Pisani canal. This causeway leads to the Piazetta of San Marco.

"Resolved to see what could take this man out at so strange an hour of the night, I cautiously followed, keeping in the dark shadows of the mansions. Passing down the entire causeway, he turned into the square, and then entered beneath the colonnades. I followed unperceived, and saw him enter beneath a portico, go up to a private portal, place a key in the lock, open the door, and quietly entering, re-lock the portal. I stood astounded ; for I well knew the palace he had thus so familiarly entered belonged to one of the dreaded rulers of Venice, the Count Luigi Passarini."

"Passarini, Passarini !" exclaimed Paoli, with a start : "I have heard that name before. Yes, it comes strongly on my memory. The Signor Alviano often related to me anecdotes of his early life. I remember his saying that the most eventful period of his existence was passed in a Venetian merchant's counting-house. I forget the name of the signor ; but he said he had saved his life ; and that his first rise in the world was through that merchant's gratitude. Alviano thought he had discovered the assassin afterwards in the merchant's nephew, who was named Passarini."

"St. Antonio !" exclaimed Juliano ; "this opens a page in the mystery that follows. It was said that the Signor Alviano was but a poor unknown and ignoble wanderer when he first entered Venice."

"Excuse me," interrupted Pulini, with flushed cheek, and in an agitated manner, "excuse me. The Signor Alviano might have been a poor wanderer from certain causes ; but they err, Juliano, who told you he was ignoble. No better blood flows in the body of the proudest noble in this cursed city than in that of the Signor Alviano. I may not declare his real name ; but Corsica is the land of his ancestors, and has been so for centuries."

Giacinto looked at his squire with amazement.

"Pardon me, my beloved lord," resumed Pulini, "that I retain any circumstance in my own breast without confiding it to you. The secret is not mine ; for my word is passed to the

Signor Alviano not to speak of my unlooked-for discovery till the day should arrive that is to unite you to his beloved child."

"Proceed, Juliano," said Giacinto, in a more cheerful voice. "I fancy I shall unravel this mystery yet."

"The Virgin grant it ! signor. But I myself begin to see a little more into the matter than before," said Juliano. "I stood, as I was saying, petrified. There could be no mistake. It was the palace Passarini, one of the grandest in Venice. As I waited wrapped in thought, I felt a heavy hand laid upon my shoulder, and actually shook with apprehension, so completely was my mind impressed with feelings of dread. Turning, however, sharply round, I beheld, standing by me, a tall figure covered with a mantle. His face was concealed by a mask. 'Who are you ?' I demanded, trying to shake off his grasp. 'Good !' exclaimed the stranger. 'You are Juliano Verbano. I am Caffagiola, the bravo.'

"Signor, the very hair of my head felt curling on my forehead. A strange fear came over me ; and yet, signor, I am not a timid man. But the name of Caffagiola, the bravo, made my very flesh creep."

"I have heard the man spoken of," said Paoli ; "and heard strange and unlikely tales of his doings. I once asked Steno how it was that such a man was not hunted out and banished. The count only laughed, and I remember well his saying, 'Such men have their uses. Do not heed all you hear in Venice.'"

"There are, in truth," resumed Juliano, "strange tales told of this man—frightful stories too. It is said, also, that he is playing a double game—that he is not a Venetian, and that when he came to Venice, years back, he had a wife and family, and that in a mad fit of jealousy he slew them all, and turned bravo. Be this as it may, I shuddered when I felt this man's hand upon my arm. 'Since when,' asked the bravo, 'has Juliano, the once merry gondolier, turned spy ?' I knew not what to say. 'You need not fear me, Juliano,' he continued, in a low deep voice, and taking me further within the colonnade, 'I would not hurt a hair of your head for your weight in ducats. But, Juliano, you play a desperate game. Why did you follow the man that entered there ? Know you who dwells within ? Do you owe that man ill will ? Has he injured you ?' 'No,' I replied, gathering courage at the kind tone of the bravo's voice. 'I owe him no ill will. He never injured so poor an individual as Juliano Verbano.' 'Boy, you are not candid,' sternly returned the bravo. 'You followed him from some motive you think to hide from me.'

Now listen to me, Juliano,' and he pressed his heavy hand upon my shoulder, 'never follow this man again. Never meddle you with the actions of those who dwell in palaces. Dream not of interfering with——. But I will say no more. I know you, Juliano, though you know me only as Caffagiola, the bravo. Go back to your bed. Speak not of what you have seen; and if you would be happy, neither dwell nor seek service in the palace of any Venetian noble. Envy them not their wealth nor their power. Their short day of tyranny,' and his voice sunk low but clear, 'too often sets in blood. Go. Little as you think it, you have a friend, as well as countryman, in the detested Caffagiola, the bravo.' Letting go my arm, he turned away, and in a moment I lost all trace of him in the gloom of the colonnade.

"I did not tarry a moment after the departure of this strange being. I felt confounded; for I perceived clearly that some fearful villany was at work against the family of the Signor Alviano. Notwithstanding the warning of the bravo, I resolved to warn the signor as to his secretary. That he was a spy, there was now, in my mind, no doubt.

"Ah, signor, now comes the miserable part of my narrative. I returned to my chamber, and, in spite of my perplexed thoughts, fell into a deep sleep. I did not awake till roused by some person shaking me. I started up. It was broad daylight. I rubbed my eyes. Oh, with what a sensation of dismay did I look upon the owner of the hand that roused me! One of the officers of San Marco stood by my bedside. 'Get up, Juliano Verbano. Dress and follow me,' said the officer, in a harsh voice. Seeing me about to speak—'Silence!' he exclaimed. 'Beware how you act. No questions. But be quick.' I gave myself up for lost. I shook in every limb. When I was dressed, the officer, who was masked, pointed to a mantle and mask, exactly similar to his own. 'Put that on.' I obeyed; though many a time it entered my mind to make a desperate effort for my liberty, by a struggle with the man. But I conjectured there were others near at hand; and I was right. At the door stood another; and, under the colonnade, two more. Not a soul did I see, as we passed out on the causeway. A long, dismal-looking gondola, with an awning stretched over its entire length, lay alongside. In it were several figures masked, and with mantles like that I wore. I entered the boat; and, pulling out of that canal, it glided into the one leading to the horrid dungeons of St. Mark. I was half tempted to throw myself into the canal, so troubled did I feel with thoughts of perhaps perpetual imprisonment.

"But, not to weary you, signor, suffice it to say I was con-

fined in a dismal cell ; and for five long months there I lay. Not one word did I exchange with a living being for those mortal long months. At the end of that period, an officer came into my cell, and desired me to follow him. I did so, though extremely weak. Coming to a chamber where stood two or three other officers, my eyes were blindfolded, and I was led by one of the men through various passages, and heard several doors open and shut. Then I felt the air of heaven blow upon my face. Still my guide led me on, till finally he stopped, and, in a distinct voice, said, 'Juliano Verbanio, you are now free.' Oh, signor, how my heart beat ! for I thought I knew that voice. The words, 'You are free !' after five dismal months passed in a dreary dungeon, sent such a burst of joy through my heart that I nearly fell to the ground. 'Move not the bandage from your face for the space of five minutes. Then go ! Be wiser for the future. But for Caffagiola the bravo, you had lingered out life beneath the leads of St. Mark.'

"I stood rooted as it were to the ground. I seemed to grow there. At last I tore the bandage from my eyes and looked before me. It was not yet clear dawn. Still, it was bright enough to see all around. Saint Antonio ! how my heart beats even now at the remembrance. I stood within ten paces of the red columns of St. Mark, and as I raised my eyes my gaze fell upon ten miserable bodies swinging between the columns. Giddy and panic-stricken with the ghastly sight, I rushed, as well as I was able, from the spot, till, coming to the borders of a canal, I sat down to collect my thoughts. The city was buried in repose ; but every moment, as the dawn increased, a solitary individual came forth from the houses. Presently, the fishing-boats began to leave the canals, and then the daily work of the gondoliers commenced.

"I heard the song of a light-hearted gondolier as he rowed up the canal towards me. I knew the man well, and as he came near I hailed him. 'Jesu Maria ! 'tis Juliano !' he exclaimed, as he came up to the steps ; 'or rather, his ghost,' he added, as he looked at me. 'Where, in the name of all the saints, have you been these many months, eh, Juliano ? Was it fever that has reduced you to this skeleton state ?' 'Even so, Paulo,' I answered. 'The morning air does me good.' 'Nay, now I look at you, Juliano,' and his eye fully scanned my face, figure, and apparel, 'I perceive it was no fever. The saints preserve us ! Get into my boat. You look faint.' I did as he bade me, and got him to row me to this house. I did not tell him one word, but the poor fellow guessed well where I came from. The worthy landlord of the Dalmatian

Arms received me as one returned from the dead. I was too ill and weak, besides being wretched in mind, to do anything but go to bed that night.

"The next day I felt better, and anxiously dressed myself in order to question the landlord as to the events that had happened during my five months' imprisonment. When I began to question him, the Signor Servite shook his head, and, taking me into a private room, carefully closed the door.

"'You see, Juliano,' began my kind friend, 'the less we talk of these things the better. We never know in Venice who hears us or sees us. The very walls appear to have ears. I have myself made it a rule never to inquire into anything that happens. Ask no questions and you will never get an uncivil answer. But with you, Juliano, I will break through my rule for once. You want to know what has happened, and I can tell you very little. It is rumoured that the State was in worse danger than in the conspiracy of the unfortunate Faliero—that Dalmatia was lost by treachery; and that a correspondence was detected between some of our nobility and the Greeks—also with Genoa. Be it as it may, several of our signors, and two or three of our nobility, have disappeared. Amongst those who have not been heard of since is the worthy Signor Alviano and his family: his servants were all dismissed, and his palace was closed with the seals of St. Mark upon the doors. Above ten unfortunate wretches were hung between the red columns, and double the number drowned in the lagunes. Gloom and dismay hung over the city for weeks.' 'And the Marchese Tiepolo,' I demanded, with gloomy forebodings. 'With respect to the princely Marchese Tiepolo—for he had the heart and the actions of a prince—they dared not touch him, I believe, even if inclined. He is connected with the reigning doge and the most leading nobles of the State. Besides, he was ever the favourite of the people—relieved them from starvation at the time of the great pestilence, and lent immense sums to the Government. In fine, no noble in Venice had a right to hold so high a head as the Marchese Tiepolo. As far as I could learn, when the Signor Alviano disappeared, the Marchese felt indignant and insulted. What he did, of course, I know not. They say he demanded a public trial of his kinsman; and they also say that the rulers of Venice know nothing of the Signor Alviano, save that he was guilty of treason to the State; but that he had fled before he could be arrested. This, Juliano,' added the Signor Servite in a whisper, 'I know to be false. The Marchese, indignant and disgusted, immediately announced his intention of quitting Venice, which he did the following week with his whole

family, deeply regretted by all classes. Where he went, of course I cannot say ; but within the last month orders have arrived to the Marchese's agent here to dispose of his palace, his villa, and all the property he possessed in Venice. His princely mansion now belongs to the family of Contarini, and the mansion of the Signor Alviano has fallen into the possession of Count Luigi Passarini's son.'

"Such, Signor Paoli, is the entire substance of all I could glean from the Signor Servite, and from several others whom I cautiously questioned. Never since the night already mentioned have I encountered the bravo Caffagiola ; and I merely remained in Venice, which I ardently longed to quit, in the hope of gaining some intelligence of those who have so miserably disappeared."

CHAPTER XXX.

COUNT LUIGI PASSARINI.

DURING the narrative of the gondolier, Paoli made few remarks ; but, though somewhat unaccountable in many parts, one thing appeared evident,—the Signor Alviano, he felt satisfied, was the victim of private vengeance, and that the enemy who had effected his ruin was Count Luigi Passarini. In times past, Alviano, when talking to our hero of the events of his early life, never related any distinct or continued narrative, but only described a few remarkable passages or events. Nevertheless, by adding a few surmises, he could easily imagine that the vengeance of Passarini was caused by Alviano's discovery that he was the assassin of his uncle.

Paoli also conjectured that, so far from the Signor Alviano having fled from Venice, he, probably at that moment, either lingered in the dungeons of St. Mark or had perished through Passarini's machinations. But where was Alviano's only and most tenderly-loved child ? Could the revenge perpetrated against the father have fallen also on the daughter ? Did the hatred of Passarini aim at the annihilation of all belonging to his victim ? Was their wealth also an object of his treachery ? These and many other thoughts tormented Paoli's brain the night after hearing the narrative of the gondolier.

The dearest wish of Juliano's heart was gratified ; for our hero took him into his service, promising that when he quitted Venice he should not be left behind ; and that, for the future, he might set his mind at rest. Leaving Pulini to give the young gondolier a brief narrative of their adventures in the East, he himself retired to ponder over what he had heard. Paoli was well aware of the despicable and atrocious system of espionage

adopted by the rulers of Venice. A secret body of police dwelt within the city ; and in every mansion, almost, the happy tranquillity of domestic life was poisoned. Not a whisper of discontent or remark upon the government escaped the ever-listening ears of the accursed spy. Even inoffensive sayings were distorted by those wretches for their own individual benefit ; for they often grew rich upon the ruin of those whose bread they ate. Suddenly, individuals would disappear from society, and some never more be heard of ; and, oftentimes, to breathe an inquiry after their fate was construed into an act of guilt.

The flight of Count Steno from Venice did not so much surprise him. Paoli knew the count well ; he was much given to political intrigue, and had powerful enemies in the city. Besides, the noble relatives of the unfortunate Marino Faliero looked upon the count with most hostile feelings. Altogether, it was very possible that Steno might have committed himself with the government.

On the following day Paoli sent for Juliano.

"I have been thinking much," said the former, "upon what you related last night ; and the conclusion I have come to is, that only from Count Luigi Passarini can we ascertain the fate of the Signor Alviano and his daughter."

"True, signor," replied the gondolier : "I have thought that long ago ; but, alas ! against one so powerful what can be done ?"

"Much, Juliano ; much, by three resolute spirits. Most conspiracies fail through the multitude of those admitted into the plot, and the variety of private schemes contemplated by the conspirators. Now, we are but three ; we have but one object in view, and I am, generally speaking, of a sanguine disposition. I think I heard you say to Pulini yesterday evening, while I was apparently buried in thought, that you have frequently seen the Count Luigi since your relief from captivity. Is that the case ?"

"Yes, signor ; such is the truth. In fact, any one may see him once or twice every week."

"How so ? And where, Juliano ?"

"The count," replied the gondolier, "purchased the villa and land belonging to the Marchese Tiepolo on the little island of Geno. You may remember, Signor Paoli, he commenced the villa before you left for Byzantium. The Count Luigi is making great alterations in the villa, and building a kind of temple on the highest part of the island. He goes there in his gondola once or twice every week, now the fine season has set in, and stays till dusk. I have passed him several times on the lagunc."

“Any one with him, Juliano ?” eagerly questioned the Corsican.

“Sometimes his son, signor ; but he is mostly alone, with four gondoliers.”

“Well, then,” calmly observed our hero, “we must seize this Count Luigi.”

Juliano started as if shot, while the stout-hearted squire rubbed his hands, exclaiming—

“By the mass, my lord, never was there a better idea. We can do it.”

Though the very first to restrain, or endeavour to restrain, his master, when bent upon what he considered a rash or wild project, Pulini was now as anxious as our hero himself. To the Signor Alviano he felt a strong attachment ; and knowing how deeply devoted his master was to the daughter, and how impossible it would be to move him from Venice till some clue was discovered, he caught eagerly at the proposed seizure of one of the dreaded Council of Ten.

“Listen to my plans,” said Paoli, in a cheerful voice. “You say Count Luigi returns from the little island about dusk. Now this island is one of the most remote on the lagune. You, Juliano, must first of all purchase a common lagune fishing-boat. Say nothing whatever to our worthy landlord. Not that I fear his loquacity ; but I am resolved, in this most treacherous city, not to bring danger or destruction upon any one besides ourselves. Can you purchase, without suspicion, such a boat as I have indicated ?”

“Most certainly, signor ; and, curious enough, before your arrival I was about to do so. You may remember the bravo said to me, ‘Seek not service beneath the roof of a Venetian noble.’ Since my release, having no gondola of my own, and unwilling to take service, I usually earned a few sequins by either aiding our fishermen or rowing a gondola for a friend. I like the life of a fisherman, since the late unfortunate events, much better than serving as a gondolier ; and Signor Servite has offered me the money to buy a boat.”

“Well, that is fortunate. Purchase a boat ; and, to avoid suspicion, receive the money from our worthy host. I shall take care to restore him the amount. As soon as you have got this boat, you and Pulini, who may very easily disguise himself in fisherman’s attire, must go forth and watch patiently until fortune favours us. Should you see Count Luigi on the island, either alone or with his son, return immediately for me. You must have arms stowed away in the boat under your nets. That is all you have to do. Leave the rest to me. I forgot to say that we must be provided with masks and

mantles. I am about, Juliano, to play a desperate game, and to tax your heart, my poor fellow, for you have suffered much."

"Nay, signor, do not wound my heart. Can you, for a moment, think I would shrink? No; not if the rack and the gibbet were certain to follow. Try me, Signor Paoli; only try me."

Paoli pressed the poor gondolier's hand kindly, saying,—

"I never doubted your courage or your fidelity, Juliano. But I almost repented dragging one so unconnected with me into the unlucky destiny that seems to pursue me."

"I will purchase the fishing-boat this very evening, Juliano; "for the day after to-morrow is the day Count generally visits the island."

"Now, what are your plans, signor?" asked Pulini, after the departure of Juliano; "for although we may succeed in entrapping this Count Luigi, it by no means follows that we shall make him confess."

"I agree with you, Pulini," responded Giacinto. "He may remain obstinately silent under any threats. Still the prospect of instant death, and the ignoble one of drowning in his own impure lagune, may do much. If he should persist in silence, I cannot, in conscience, meddle with his life. But I will try other means; we must bind and gag him. Juliano knows the Chiozzi channel. We will take him to where we left our horses, and carry him without the Venetian territories, and, by strict confinement, wring from him a confession that the fear of death might not have the power to do."

"I have heard Juliano say," remarked Pulini, "that this Count Luigi is a coward at heart."

"So is every assassin," returned Paoli. "A treacherous villain, like Passarini, is ever a coward when tried. And my life to a ducat, he will become abject with fear the moment he sees he is helplessly in our power."

Notwithstanding the hopes of our hero, a fortnight elapsed before Juliano could give notice that the Signor Passarini had landed alone on the island of Geno.

It was a calm, lovely day in the early summer, when Paoli, masked, and enveloped in a plain brown mantle, embarked on board the fishing-boat of Juliano. A low canvas awning was in the boat, beneath which he stretched himself upon some nets, any other position being quite impossible. Pulling quietly out from the canals, they slowly pursued their way to the picturesque island of Geno. Within a thousand yards of it was another island, a mere mass of sandrock, but famous

for the resort of a certain species of fish peculiar to the lagunes of Venice.

Off this island, our hero, Pulini, and Juliano cast anchor, watching intently any movements going on in the island of Geno. Passarini's gondola had to pass close by where they were anchored, on his return to Venice.

"We must be very alert, Juliano," remarked Paoli, "and be certain of running foul of his gondola; for if once he passes us, it would be utterly impossible to overtake him."

Slowly wore the day to the impatient occupiers of the fishing-boat; and yet, during the tedious hours of delay, the scene around them was lovely in the extreme. Scarce five miles off lay the vast and imposing city of the waves, the self-styled Queen of the Adriatic. The lagune, studded with islands—on some of which rose many a stately mansion—was also covered with countless barks, from the galley and argosy, to the gilded barge, the sombre gondola, and the picturesque fishing crafts. Music and joyous laughter came from many a gay bark that floated by during the day; but, as evening closed, that remote part of the lagune became entirely deserted! yet the gondola of Count Luigi still remained moored to the quay of the island.

The shades of night were fast creeping over the sluggish waters, undisturbed even by a ripple, when Juliano gave notice that the gondola of the count had pushed from the quay. The anchor of our conspirators was up in a moment, Juliano and Pulini taking the oars, while Paoli seized the tiller, as they pulled slowly on towards Venice. Presently the gondola of the count came rapidly on, under the vigorous strokes of four stout oarsmen. When nearly alongside, Paoli put down his tiller, saying, in a low voice,—

"Pull your best!"

The next moment, with a violent shock, they ran foul of the gondola of one of the terrible rulers of Venice.

A volley of curses and other maledictions was the commencement of hostilities on the part of the count's gondoliers, who were astounded at the audacity or insolence of a fishing boat running foul of their illustrious master's boat on the broad lagune. But the next instant, Juliano and Pulini leaped aboard; and, with their swords at the throats of the unarmed and now terrified gondoliers, soon quieted their outcries, while Paoli, joining the onset, advanced towards the pavilion just as Count Luigi threw back the silken curtains to demand the reason of the uproar. The count stood stupefied on seeing the assailants; then, with a face pale as death, fell

back, and drew a dagger from his vest. A handsome lamp lit the pavilion ; and, as Paoli entered, the count sank upon the luxurious cushions, saying,—

“ Who are you ? and what means this insolent intrusion ? ”

Juliano was right. Count Luigi Passarini was a coward—a very coward in heart and soul. Paoli saw that at a glance ; and a smile of scorn curled his lip, as, dashing his mask from his face, he said,—

“ We have met before, Count Luigi Passarini, and, no doubt, you remember who I am. Consult your heart, if you possess such a commodity, and you will guess at once the cause of my intrusion.”

Ghastly was the face of the Venetian, as his strained gaze fell upon the noble features of the knight.

Throwing open the curtains of the pavilion, Paoli showed to the startled Passarini that they were the sole occupants of the gondola ; for he had settled with Pulini that he should take the four gondoliers into their boat, and land them on the little island off which they had anchored. A night passed there, at that season of the year, would be of very little inconvenience to them.

“ Now, Count Luigi Passarini, you see we are alone. I have staked my life upon the issue of this attempt. Yours, count, is also at stake ; for I tell you, by this cross,” and the knight kissed the cross-handle of his sword, “ if you deceive me, or falsely answer the questions I shall now ask you, you will find your grave in the waters of this accursed lagune, which, for ages, have hidden the bodies of your victims.”

Vain was every effort of Count Luigi to summon courage. His pride, his scorn, his haughty temper, all fell beneath the withering glance of the Corsican.

“ I now ask you, count, of what crime was the Signor Alviano accused, that himself and his family should be cut off from all ties and connections ? ”

Passarini, for a moment, was unable to answer. He was well aware of the determined spirit of his questioner. The count was one of the council that insisted on Paoli’s banishment from Venice. He therefore rapidly turned over in his mind all the chances in his favour, and saw, in the end, that no mode of escape was left but in speaking the truth. Therefore, in reply to the Corsican’s question, he said,—

“ Bartolomeo Alviano was accused of treason to the Se, att was tried and found guilty.”

“ Treason, count ! ” returned Paoli ; “ what on earth could the merchant Alviano have done to incur such a charge ? ”

“ It was distinctly and fully proved,” replied the Venetian,

"that Bartolomeo Alviano corresponded with the Greeks of Byzantium, after it had been declared treason to do so. Letters were also discovered proving he corresponded also with Genoa. Again, it was ascertained that he had lodged nearly the whole of his immense wealth in the Bank of St. George, in Pisa, though that wealth was gained under the protection of the banners of St. Mark."

"You could tell, probably," interrupted Paoli, disgusted at hearing on what paltry charges an innocent man was convicted of treason and condemned, "you could tell who was the writer, or forger of those letters. You, Count Luigi, had in your service a man named Tomaso Mocenego, who was forced upon the Signor Alviano as a secretary."

The Count started to his feet. Again his hand grasped his dagger; and an expression of fiendish malice passed over his features. But one look at the powerful form of the Corsican, and at his self-possession, as if he were merely in the presence of a child, demonstrated how useless would be any struggle with such a man, even were his associates not at hand.

"I know more, Count Luigi, of the past than you can imagine. He who could have the devilish heart to attempt the assassination of his uncle, would be capable of perpetrating any crime." This was a random shot on the part of the Corsican; but the blanched cheek and trembling limbs of the Venetian proved to Paoli that his surmise was correct.

"And," pursued our hero, "such a man could easily plot the downfall of one against whom he nourished a deadly hate. But no more of this. I now ask, when the Signor Alviano was found guilty, what was his fate? And what became of his child, his only daughter? For surely," and the lip of our hero curled with bitter scorn and contempt, "surely, she was not charged with treason."

"The Signor Alviano was sentenced to perpetual banishment from Venice and all her colonies; and whatever property he possessed within the territories of Venice was confiscated."

"And how was this iniquitous sentence carried into execution?"

"They were conveyed, under an escort of six officers of the Republic, beyond the territories of Venice, and left at the boundary stone of the Paduan territory."

"Will you swear to this, Count Luigi Passarini?" sternly demanded the Corsican. "Will you swear on the cross, will you stake your salvation, that neither Alviano nor his daughter linger in any of the prisons of Venice? Will you, on your sacred oath, avouch that they were left beyond your bounda-

ries, free and unshackled, to go whither they pleased ? Will you solemnly swear to this ?" And Paoli advanced close to the Venetian.

" Most willingly and in truth," exclaimed Passarini, " will I swear."

As the Corsican held to him the cross of his sword to kiss, a fiendish spirit of vengeance rose in the heart of the Venetian. Quick as light he drew the poniard from his vest, and struck it with all his force at the heart of the Corsican, forgetful of what might be his own fate afterwards. In striking the blow, he started back with an impious curse ; and, slipping, in his eagerness and terror, he fell backwards against the flimsy curtains of the pavilion, bursting them ; and the gondola—one of those built for speed—heeled over with his weight. Uttering a cry of agony, Count Luigi Passarini disappeared beneath the dark waters of the lagune.

Paoli, perfectly unhurt—for he wore beneath his vest a chain shirt of exquisitely wrought Milan steel—when he saw the treacherous villain falling overboard, leaned over to catch him before he disappeared ; but so sudden had been the fall of the count that he was too late.

It was now quite dark ; and, as Paoli looked over the side, expecting each moment to see the count rise to the surface, and intending to pull him on board, he heard the voice of Pulini at a short distance, say,—

" Did you hail, signor ? Has anything happened ?"

" Yes," exclaimed Paoli ; " look about you. Count Luigi has fallen into the water, after making a most villainous attempt to stab me."

" Then the devil has his own by this time," muttered the squire, as he and Juliano pulled up alongside.

" We are not fifty yards from the island," said Juliano. " We have drifted close in. Perhaps he has swam ashore."

" I scarcely think that," returned Paoli, gazing somewhat anxiously over the dark waters ; " for he struck his head against that iron staunchion, and went down like a stone. Row round some distance, and see if there is any sign of him. Villain as he surely was, let him not die with all his sins upon his head."

But vain was their search ; no trace of Count Luigi was to be discovered.

" There is no use in our lingering here, signor," said Pulini. " If he has gone to keep company with the many victims he has condemned to the same fate, we must leave him there ; and should he have got to yonder island, there let him stay.

But it's very clear, if he has escaped with life, the sooner we are out of Venice the better."

"Let us search the island," said Juliano. "If he has perished, we are perfectly safe ; but if he has escaped, we had better not attempt to return to Venice, but make for Chiozzi at once. The gondoliers on the island have no idea who we are. Pulini and I can land, and five minutes will take us all over the bank."

"Do so," said Paoli : "I will await your return."

In half an hour they returned.

"He is not there," said Pulini ; "therefore must be drowned. The four men were rolled up in an old sail under a shed on the top of the bank, apparently very little troubled about their situation. They take us for *ladri de mare*. We said nothing to them about the fate of their master ; but walked round the bank, and saw no trace of him."

"What a singular fate for a councillor of St. Mark!" thought Paoli, as, entering the fishing boat, they pulled for Venice, leaving the gondola of the so late powerful Count Luigi Passarini to float with the passing breeze.

"And now, signor," said Juliano, "I think we had better make but little stay in Venice. When I land you at the Piazzetta, I will take this boat where it will not be seen, for fear any of those men might recognize it ; not that that would be very likely ; for it is so exactly similar to all of its class that we run little risk. Still it is better to be secure."

After landing, Paoli and his squire proceeded to the Dalmatian Arms, where Paoli imparted to his anxious attendant all the conversation that passed between him and the councillor of St. Mark.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BARTOLOMEO ALVIANO.

WE must now entreat the indulgence of our readers for the retrograde movements we are forced to make in our story.

We have previously mentioned how the younger brother of the Marchese Damari left his native home in the little island of Capraja, to seek his fortunes upon the continent of Europe. On landing on the shores of Italy, in compliance with the wishes of his kind and affectionate, but proud brother, he dropped the name of Damari, and took that of Alviano.

On the early fortunes of the then enthusiastic youth it is needless to dwell. Like all who view the world at a distance,

he entered it to be deceived and plundered by false friends and false representations. We take up his narrative, therefore, at the period when he entered Venice, poor and friendless, but neither dispirited nor hopeless. His object in resorting to Venice was to procure employment in some of the great mercantile houses; for Bartolomeo was ashamed to return, thus poor and stripped of the large sums with which he had departed, to the open arms of his brother.

"No," he reasoned with himself, "I will struggle yet awhile with fortune. I am older, and not so new to the crafts of the world."

But the poor, lonely, unfriended foreigner might have wandered the narrow causeways of Venice for months without succeeding in the object of his ambition.

Accident, or that fickle dame—Fortune, stood his friend.

Assassination, not at all a rare occurrence in any of the fair cities of the south at that period, was particularly common in Venice, and caused very little astonishment.

One night, returning after a solitary and musing ramble beneath the arcades of the only square in Venice—that of San Marco—Bartolomeo Alviano saved a signor's life from the dagger of an assassin, by interposing, courageously but heedlessly, his own body in the way of the murderer's steel. Though severely wounded, Alviano—a man of the pen, not the sword—struggled gallantly; for the villain strove to complete his purpose. In the scuffle the assassin's mask fell to the ground, and Alviano beheld the man's features, though the prostrate Venetian did not. The face was remarkable, and it remained strongly impressed on the memory of Alviano. Some persons approaching, the assassin fled.

It was now ascertained that the individual, against whose life the ruffian's dagger was originally aimed, was a merchant, by name Dalmasso. He ordered the senseless body of his preserver to be carried to his own palace. During many weeks, Alviano's recovery was doubtful: every care was bestowed upon him; and when he was able to leave his couch, the merchant requested to know to whom he was so deeply indebted.

Alviano told his simple tale, excepting his real name and birthplace. His fine open countenance, frank manners, and the abilities he had at times displayed in conversation, won the esteem of the Venetian; and Alviano was offered a respectable place in his employment, with a good salary, which was accepted with gratitude and joy.

In conversing with the Signor Dalmasso, Alviano discovered that he had not the slightest idea as to who the villain was that attempted his life. In fact, so well respected and beloved

was the wealthy merchant, that even his friends were of opinion that his person must have been mistaken by the assassin for another.

One morning the Signor Dalmasso said to his young friend,—

“ You are now, thank God, quite recovered. I will take you to my counting-house. My nephew, a steady, quiet youth, is just returned from Trieste; he is my chief clerk. I must make you acquainted with him.”

On entering the long and well-lighted room of the merchant's counting-house, Alviano perceived that nearly twenty clerks were employed writing at a long table.

“ You and my nephew,” said the merchant, “ will have a smaller and more cheerful chamber to yourselves. Follow me.”

In another apartment, into which the merchant led, sat a young man, rather plainly attired; for, at this period, no law existed relative to the dress of Venetian subjects. The young man had his back to the merchant and his *protégé*, but, on the former saying—

“ Andrea, let me introduce my young friend and your future companion to you: you will soon be on terms of cordiality, I feel convinced, as I know, Andrea, you will value your uncle's preserver—”

The young man rose, and turned quietly round, at the same time stretching out his hand towards Alviano, and saying, in a calm, measured voice—

“ As the preserver of your life, dear uncle, I envy the Signor Alviano; but with all my heart I welcome him.”

As the youth rose, and turned, Alviano raised his eyes to his face; but, as he did so, he felt the blood forsake his cheeks; his limbs trembled; and, instead of taking the offered hand, he staggered a pace back.

“ I fear, uncle,” said the youth, “ you have brought the signor out too soon. The change of air, Signor Alviano, has affected you.”

“ Merciful Providence!” mentally ejaculated Alviano, “ do I dream? do I behold the assassin? or does an imaginary likeness distract me?”

Seeing the distressed look of the worthy merchant, who kindly offered him his arm, knowing how strange his conduct must appear, and feeling that, after all, he might be mistaken, Alviano rallied, exerted himself, pleaded sudden pain, and, after a time, really thinking he must have been under an illusion, returned the young man thanks for his kindness; and, shortly after, the merchant left them, saying—

"There, I am glad to see you recovered, my dear young friend. I leave you under the care and tuition of Andrea."

Bartolomeo felt strangely perplexed. It seemed to him incredible that so very young a man as the merchant's nephew should commit so foul a crime. And for what purpose? He thought he must have been mistaken, yet the features of the assassin, like those of Andrea, were most remarkable in their expression.

Plunged in reverie, Alviano was unconscious that the young man's eyes were steadily fixed upon him, till at length his meditations were broken by the merchant's nephew saying—

"What does the Signor Alviano think of Venice? Though, in sooth," he added, with a singular smile upon his lips, "your first intimacy with our citizens was a rough one."

"As you may suppose," replied Alviano, "I can know but little of either Venice or its inhabitants; but it is a fair city to look upon, and doubtless its citizens are no more vicious than those of any of the other cities of Italy."

"Ah, Signor Alviano, you do not know us. More assassinations and secret murders take place within the confines of Venice than in any other four cities of Italy, even including Rome. You must be very careful in your choice of acquaintance, Signor Alviano. And I am sorry I can, in that respect, be of little service to you; for two years I have been absent from Venice. I spent some months in Rome; and the last eight months I have been transacting business for my most worthy uncle in Trieste. I expect shortly to proceed to Byzantium, where my uncle has established an extensive branch of commerce."

"I must be mistaken," thought Alviano.

After some trivial conversation, Andrea suddenly said—

"You cannot be aware, Signor Alviano, of the deep debt of gratitude I owe to the Signor Dalmasso. I must give you a very short sketch of the family of which you now form a part. You must know," continued the youth, "that I have a twin brother."

Alviano gave a slight start, and looked up into the calm, cold features of the speaker, who, however, without noticing the emotion of Alviano, continued his recital.

"Our father was the Count Passarini; and, some years before his mysterious disappearance, he was one of the first and most opulent of our Venetian nobles. The count was unjustly accused of joining in a most dangerous conspiracy against the State. His papers were seized, and he himself suddenly vanished. Our mother perished in giving us birth. After our father's disappearance—we were scarcely two years old at the

time—the whole of his property was confiscated, he was declared a traitor and an outlaw. Alas! it was, I fear, too well surmised that he died by torture in the dungeons of St. Mark. Several other nobles were accused. Some were executed; some banished; while many citizens of minor note were daily suspended from the red columns. Guilty or not guilty, from that day to this nothing more was ever heard of our ill-fated parent. We were immediately adopted by our excellent uncle and only relative, the Signor Dalmasso, and carefully reared by him. But, notwithstanding all his care in our moral education, my brother turned out very wild, very dissipated, and of an obstinate and wilful temper. He lost large sums of money; and, finally, he fled this city with a lady of exceeding beauty, but, as you may suppose, very low morals. Since that, we have never heard of him; although," and Andrea spoke with marked emphasis, "it has been said he was seen some time back in Venice. Now, signor, you have, in a few words, our family history. Can you wonder if I feel a profound veneration for the character of the Signor Dalmasso, who has not only paid immense sums for my brother's follies, but has spared no expense in my education? He intends making me his partner, and has also hinted, in plain terms, that I shall be his heir."

"He is, in truth, Signor Passarini," replied Alviano, in a much more cheerful voice, "a most kind and noble signor. And now," thought Alviano to himself, "I have been deceived. Doubtless the twins are like one another. Could the brother have secretly returned to Venice to assassinate his uncle? And for what, if the Signor Andrea Passarini is already constituted his heir?"

Shortly after, the young men returned together to the mansion of the Signor Dalmasso, where Andrea had a suite of apartments.

Days, weeks, and months rolled on without the occurrence of any other event of importance. Every day increased the confidence of the merchant for his *protégé*; and every day, despite his efforts, Alviano grew more distrustful of the merchant's nephew.

Passarini's chief companion was one of the head clerks of the establishment. This young man was by birth a Paduan, of respectable parents, so far as his own assertion went, and an orphan. His name was Guido Mussato. In manners, he was mild, silent, and reserved; but the expression of his ill-favoured features had something so unaccountably repellent, that few, if any, excepting the merchant's nephew, could bear his society.

Alviano steadily avoided all intercourse with this young man;

and, from some chance expressions he one day unintentionally overheard, all his former suspicions concerning Andrea Passarini were revived. By attentive observation he became convinced that Andrea, with the assistance of Mussato, intended to take the life of the Signor Dalmasso. Alviano knew not what steps to take. To attempt to open the eyes of the uncle to the character of the nephew, would be a difficult if not an impossible task ; as he possessed no positive proofs to support so horrible an accusation. He himself had heard quite sufficient while Mussato was closeted with Andrea. But would not the word of Dalmasso's nephew be believed more readily than his ?

One night, as he lay awake, pondering how he might save his generous patron from the base designs of his nephew, he fancied he saw a light flash across his chamber from the key-hole, or from under the door. The hour was extremely late. No domestics slept in front of the mansion. In fact, the part of the house appropriated to the clerks was, in a manner, divided from the front by a pair of large folding doors crossing the hall. A large bell was suspended within their side, from which a wire-rope led into the chamber of the Signor Dalmasso, whose nephew slept in the apartment beyond that occupied by Alviano, but in the same corridor.

Suspicious of every trifle, Bartolomeo no sooner beheld the light than he arose ; and, throwing on part of his dress, cautiously opened the door, and looked along the corridor. To his great surprise he beheld, at the further end, a figure bearing a light. The figure was, for a few seconds, stationary. Scarcely giving himself time for thought, he returned into his chamber, and took down from the mantel-piece a dagger that hung there, and hurried back to the corridor. The figure had vanished, and not a ray of light was to be seen. Groping along the wall, and arriving at the end of the passage, he again caught a glimpse of the light, and then distinctly perceived two figures ascending the flight of stairs leading to the Signor Dalmasso's sleeping-room. Bartolomeo himself stood in obscurity ; but he easily recognised the two figures to be Andrea Passarini and Guido Mussato.

On reaching the top of the stairs they paused, and Alviano perceived Mussato hand the lamp to his companion. Taking from beneath his mantle a bowl, he poured something from a bottle into the vessel ; and then he and his confederates fixed two masks upon their faces.

Alviano shuddered, and trembled in every limb.

"Gracious Heaven ! " he exclaimed, " they are going to poison my benefactor ! " His first impulse was to turn, rush back, and gain that part of the mansion where slept the

domestics ; but he reflected that before they could be brought to the assistance of their master he would no longer need it. Therefore, without further hesitation, he grasped his dagger, and, rushing across the passage, ascended the flight of steps almost at a bound. As he approached he heard the sounds of contention from the merchant's chamber, into which he sprang, resolved to sacrifice himself in an effort to save him.

The moment was, in truth, a critical one ; Mussato held a poniard to the breast of the Signor Dalmasso, who struggled violently, while his nephew was endeavouring to pour the contents of the bowl down his throat.

As Alviano darted with a loud cry into the chamber, the poisoned bowl fell from the hands of the assassin, and the grasp of the villain Mussato relaxed. With a vigorous effort, the Signor Dalmasso sprang from his couch, and, seizing the bell-rope, pulled with violence.

“Stab him, Guido!” screamed Passarini, as, with the yell of a fiend, he darted upon Alviano, who fought manfully, but was struck bleeding to the floor. The next moment, however, the sound of men's voices was heard. Dashing the lamp upon the floor, and stamping his foot upon the prostrate body of the merchant, the villain fled. Andrea Passarini effected his escape ; but his accomplice, Mussato, after a fierce struggle, was secured.

Several weeks passed before Bartolomeo recovered from his wound. The Signor Dalmasso then informed him of what had occurred during his illness. Satisfied that his nephew had fled from Venice for ever, his outraged uncle left him to his fate. Mussato, handed over to the authorities of Venice, was branded on the forehead and condemned to the galleys for life.

Already greatly attached to his preserver, the Venetian merchant formally adopted him, according to the fashion of the times ; and St. Mark acknowledged him as an elected son of the Venetian republic. Shortly afterwards Alviano's name became associated with that of Dalmasso as partner ; and some years subsequently he married into the noble house of Pisani, and thus became connected with the Marchese Tiepolo. He then sailed for Byzantium, in order there to establish extensive mercantile connections. In Byzantium he lost his beloved wife, which for a long period plunged him into the deepest grief. His only child Agnes was sent to Venice and committed to the care of her aunt, the Marchesa Tiepolo, to be educated with her daughters. On the death of the Signor Dalmasso, who was carried off by the great pestilence that nearly depopulated Venice, he inherited the whole of his great wealth.

During these eventful years Alviano had despatched several couriers with letters to his brother, the Marchese Damari. Kind and affectionate replies were received: still the same eccentric idea with respect to commerce retained possession of Damari's mind. He said in one of his letters, "The name you have selected has been a fortunate one. Retain it; at least while I live." This appeared a strange prejudice to the liberal and generous mind of Bartolomeo Alviano; but he little heeded distinction of blood or high-sounding names. His child was all a fond father could wish. She would be as eagerly sought after as the heiress of the wealthy Alviano, as if known to be the niece of the proud, feudal lord of the little Island of Capraja.

Years rolled over; and the long-absent merchant returned, as we have already seen, with his beautiful daughter, to Venice, after an absence of twenty years.

During those twenty years we must briefly state how fared the fortunes of the outcast Andrea Passarini. After flying from Venice, he sought refuge in the Tuscan states, where, having been a gambler from his earliest years, he addicted himself to that vice with increased pertinacity and with various changes of fortune, till, being detected in a fraud, he fled from Florence into the Roman states; and in Rome, to his astonishment, he encountered his twin brother, Luigi, living in great splendour. This man, who in person was identical with his brother, differed from him in some respects in mind and disposition. Luigi was not a cold-blooded villain; but he was a wild, profligate, bad man. The riches he seemed to possess astonished Andrea, but only for a short time, for the seeming mystery was soon explained. Luigi Passarini was, in fact, one of those celebrated robber chiefs, who, some years prior to the revolution of Cola Rienzi, infested with daring and singular audacity the Campagna of Rome, and levied with impunity a regular tax from the various towns and villages in the vicinity of the eternal city. Rienzi certainly deserved the applause of Italy by extirpating those bandits and their formidable miniature armies.

Andrea joined his brother, but being a coward at heart, he only acted the part of spy; assumed his brother's name, Luigi, and appeared in society as the Count Luigi Passarini. In this way he served the robbers effectually.

After the lapse of two years his brother and several of the band were carried off by a pestilential fever. Andrea was offered the command, but, as so hazardous a life by no means suited his taste, he received his share of booty and quitted that part of Italy. Some time afterwards he arrived in

Florence, still under his brother's name ; and assuming the title his father bore, he succeeded in winning the hand of the only daughter of Count Donati, a Florentine nobleman of considerable influence but little wealth. Count Luigi, as we shall now call him, persuaded the Count Donati that, as nothing had ever been proved against his father, it was quite possible, through his influence, and the political state of affairs between Florence and Venice, to get his father's estates restored to him. The Count interested himself in a powerful quarter, and after a lapse of some time, Count Luigi was acknowledged to be the heir of his father, and a certain portion of his sire's confiscated property was restored. Count Luigi then married Donati's daughter, and, at the death of the Merchant Dalmasso, returned with his wife and son to Venice.

Before this, he had been joined by the villain Mussato, who had previously escaped from the galleys. This man was not to be deceived by the change of Andrea into Luigi ; and Passarini, who was aware that the wretch knew too much, but, at the same time, could be useful to him in his schemes of vengeance, took him into his service under the name of Mocenego. This scoundrel, who had the art of completely disguising his person, felt no fear of returning to Venice.

Years rolled on. By intrigues, wealth, and influence, Passarini became a member of the Council of Forty, and, in process of time, succeeded in becoming one of the ten rulers of the republic. During this lapse of years, his vengeance, though it slumbered, was unappeased. His victim was beyond his reach. To have the merchant Alviano assassinated would, the Count Passarini thought, be a poor revenge. He sighed for a deeper and more lasting vengeance. At length, after twenty years of absence, Alviano returned to Venice, the possessor of immense wealth, and the father of an only and dearly-cherished daughter.

"Now, then," whispered the proud ruler of the Venetians, "my hour is come."

"And mine," said Mussato, to whom he spoke, raising the red wig he wore from his brow, and showing the brand of St. Mark upon his forehead.

It required but little ingenuity, in one possessing such immense power as that of Passarini, to bring about the ruin of his victim.

At the period of Alviano's return to Venice, Passarini was a widower, with an only son. His object was, not only to deprive Alviano of his wealth, but also to tear from him his child, to rob him of his good name—get him banished Venice, and then leave him to the merciless hatred of Guido Mussato.

We have seen how Mussato, thoroughly disguised, was placed as a secretary in the mansion of the Signor Alviano. The rest was easy: first it was discovered that Alviano still corresponded with the Greeks (while strictly prohibited by the senate), also with a merchant in Genoa. This correspondence was carried on solely in the earnest desire of discovering the fate of Paoli. Then it was ascertained that the merchant had lodged the greater portion of his wealth in the great bank of St. George, in Pisa, preparatory to quitting the Venetian territory for ever. Mussato, an adept in counterfeiting handwriting, forged various letters and documents. When all was ready Alviano was secretly denounced, and, in the dead of night, Passarini had the merchant and his daughter seized, and lodged in the dungeons of St. Mark.

After a most absurd mock trial, before Passarini and two of his firm friends, Alviano was found guilty and banished. Whatever property he possessed in the State was confiscated. But should his daughter accept the hand of a Venetian noble or citizen, the property would, as an act of clemency, be restored to her husband.

This was part of Passarini's projects, for he thought it quite possible to make the daughter accept the hand of his own son, and thus, while satisfying his vengeance, he should gratify his grasping avarice.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DOOM OF THE SPY.

I fear the iniquitous designs of Count Passarini prospered. Through his machinations Bartolomeo Alviano, in his old age, was stripped of his wealth and banished with the stigma of traitor attached to his name. But the last act of the tragedy was yet to be performed before the count could say he was sufficiently revenged. He had yet to deprive Alviano of his only child—to wed her to his only son—and then, by his power and treachery, claim the confiscated property of his victim, as well as the immense sums Alviano possessed in the banks of Florence and Pisa; for well he knew the fate in store for the banished man consigned to the mercy of his villainous associate Guido Mussato.

After sentence had been passed upon Alviano, Passarini easily obtained the control over the persons of himself and daughter. The unfortunate merchant remained a prisoner in the damp cells of the prison, while the distracted child, torn from her parent's arms, was closely confined in a remote chamber of the Passarini Palace. In vain the Marchese

Tiepolo, before he quitted Venice, exerted himself to discover whether his unfortunate relatives had really fled or still lingered in the dungeons of St. Mark. But Passarini's power and artifices baffled every effort. Aware of the sentence passed upon her father, Agnes did not feel its full bitterness till torn from his arms and conveyed to the chamber assigned to her.

In vain the distracted maiden implored permission to follow her beloved and heart-broken father into exile. No other answer was given to her tears and prayers than that, if she consented to marry a citizen of Venice, the property of her father would be restored to her, and probably she might then be allowed to correspond with her parent in his place of exile.

"Never, never," exclaimed Agnes, wringing her hands passionately, "shall hand of mine be joined to that of a citizen of this unjust and cruel-government."

Alviano, when too late, discovered that in Luigi Passarini he beheld the assassin Andrea ; and in Tomaso Mocenego the branded Guido Mussato, the galley-slave.

"Why not, father," exclaimed Agnes, when first he informed her of his discovery, "why not expose these villains to those who will judge you ? Surely there must be some justice even in Venice."

"Justice, my child !" bitterly exclaimed the prisoner "there can be no justice when your enemy is one of the mysterious rulers of Venice. My trial will be only a mockery ; my accuser, my judge, and examiner, will be Andrea Passarini. My voice will be silenced, and my words and actions misrepresented. No, no ; better let the villain suppose I know him only as Luigi Passarini."

About a week after the sentence of banishment was pronounced against Alviano, Count Luigi Passarini entered the chamber where Agnes was kept a close prisoner. The unfortunate maiden shuddered when she beheld her father's bitter and unrelenting persecutor enter the room and close the door. But, summoning the native dignity of her character, she appeared, as the Venetian bent his keen glance upon her pale but still lovely features, prepared to dare the worst his malice could project.

"Lady," said the count, speaking in a low but marked tone, "I have left you a week to decide upon the choice which the clemency of your father's judges has left to you. I now wish to learn whether you will accept the hand of a citizen of Venice, or follow him into exile. By uniting yourself to a Venetian, your father's property will be restored."

"Signor," interrupted the maiden, joyfully, "there is no need of further delay. My mind has been made up from the first, and with my whole heart I thank those whose decree has permitted me to accompany my beloved father into banishment. As to his wealth, they are most heartily welcome to it. I covet none of it."

"So I surmised, signora," coldly returned the count, with a sinister smile. "But circumstances have occurred since that choice was left you which materially alter the case. That you despise wealth I can very readily imagine. Had you accepted a noble Venetian for a husband I would have remained silent. Now I can no longer do so. Since your father's sentence of banishment was pronounced, facts have come to light that place his life in peril."

"My father's life in danger!" exclaimed the maiden, starting to her feet, her face pale as death, but her eyes sparkling with indignation and terror. "What can you mean? Surely you would not revoke your sentence, and take an old and, as you well know, an innocent man's life. No, Count Passarini, I understand you well," bitterly continued the maiden, as her gaze met the malicious glance of the councillor. "This is a mere threat of yours, but you shall not triumph. I know you, Andrea Passarini, cold-blooded poisoner as you are, and sooner than wed one connected by blood with you, the destroyer of my father, I would joyfully perish at the stake."

Passarini turned deadly pale as the excited maiden spoke, and returned his astounded gaze with an unshrinking look.

"Ha! you say you know me!" burst from his lips, as he advanced, and, with rage and hatred flashing from his eyes, seized her fiercely by the arm. "But you are mistaken, proud, foolish girl! You have yet to know me, and to tremble at my hatred and my vengeance!"

So saying, in a cruel and cowardly rage he threw from him the fair girl, who fell prostrate upon the floor. Casting on her a malicious look, he continued,—

"You have gained a knowledge you will dearly rue. Mark me, girl! You shall mate with the lowest ruffian in Venice, the scum of this city, the slave of a vile outcast. Your father—"

"Oh, God! my beloved father!" ejaculated Agnes. "I am mad—I have been mad! Oh, spare my father!" And the wretched girl strove to rise, but he spurned her and left the chamber, livid with rage and hatred.

Turning the key in the door, the count strode along the corridor till he reached his own private chamber. He then

summoned Mussato to his presence ; but, before his vile associate entered the room, the count had, to a certain degree, mastered his passion.

"It is time," said the councillor of San Marco, as he paced the chamber, "to bring this long-postponed business to an end."

"Signor, I am ready," returned the ruffian. "No child ever longed for a gilded bauble more than I languish till my dagger drinks the blood of him who has left the brand of San Marco upon my brow."

"To all appearance, the sentence passed upon Alviano must be strictly carried out," said the count. "The girl is obstinate, and has sealed her own doom."

The leaden eye of Mussato for a second was lit up with a singular expression.

"A litter and escort," resumed Passarini, "will be provided to convey father and daughter to the great boundary-stone on the margin of the Paduan marsh. The gondola of St. Mark will convey them across the lagune. Now, mark how you are to proceed. Six selected men will attend you, and you must follow the escort at a moderate distance. As soon as the father and daughter are left alone in that desolate spot, ride up and take the girl under your charge. You need no instructions with regard to the father. I leave him," he added, with the look of a fiend, "to your tender care. He knows me already ; perhaps you will enlighten him as regards your own identity. Carry the girl to my castle at Poliverra, and consign her to the custody of Jacopo Vernie ; he will know what to do, as my messenger will reach him before you. And now, Guido Mussato, it were as well, as our purpose is brought to a close, that you return no more to Venice. You are amply provided for, and you know our compact. The world is a wide one ; and, with all your skill and art in disguise, you might yet be discovered in Venice. You will breathe freer beyond the atmosphere of the lagunes."

"You shall be obeyed to the letter, my lord," replied Mussato, humbly ; and, with a servile bow, he quitted the chamber. As he closed the door, he muttered to himself, "The count is right. Being no longer useful, I become dangerous ; and I begin to think it is perilous to have a Member of the Council of Ten for a master ! "

Mussato was no sooner gone than the count drew a sheet of paper from his escritoire, and wrote two lines upon it, signed it, and directed it to his chatelain, Jacopo Vernie. As he did so, he muttered, half aloud, and with a mocking laugh,—

"This will effectually provide for my worthy friend Mus-

sato. "Twere dangerous for his safety to permit him any longer to remain at large."

An hour after, a courier left Venice for the count's castle at Poliverra ; and early the following morning a gondola, impelled by six oars, shot out from the Piazza San Marco, coming forth from the deep arch which was well known to lead to the dungeons beneath the ducal palace. The men pulled rapidly into the lagune, and took the leading canal in the direction of the mouth of the Brenta. It was a dull, dreary morning : a thick, grey vapour lay motionless, for want of wind, upon the sluggish waters, shrouding all the grandeur and beauty of that strange sea-built city, and wrapping every object in its chill embrace.

After some few mistakes, owing to the fog, the gondola's keel grated on the soft sand of the beach.

About fifty paces from the strand, on a slight elevation, stood a large building, with open sheds encircling it on three sides. From those sheds, as soon as the boat touched the beach, there issued a horse litter, attended by eight or ten armed troopers, with the badge of the Venetian republic on their bannerols. From the gondola then stepped out on the beach a signor enveloped in a mantle, followed by a young female, who tenderly supported the somewhat feeble steps of the signor, who appeared exhausted and weak, more by sufferings than age, though he was advanced in life. The two strangers were then placed in the litter, the curtains drawn, and, surrounded by the men-at-arms, the *cortège* proceeded as rapidly as that mode of conveyance could accomplish.

The signor within the litter was the merchant Alviano, and the lady was his daughter, who, in her heart of hearts, exulted as she threw back a glance, on entering the litter, at the slumbering waters of the lagune, hoping and praying she might never again be borne upon its treacherous surface.

After about two hours' travelling, the escort and the litter halted where three roads met, in as dismal a spot as ever traveller's eye rested upon in the territories of Venice. The place was a vast swamp, or marsh, formed by the overflowings of the Brenta and other streams. The officer commanding the escort ordered a halt : and then the merchant and his daughter were desired to alight. This they did without a word.

The Venetian pointed to a vast mass of rough stone built in the form of a pyramid. On the flat side, prepared for the purpose, was rudely sculptured the arms of the Venetian republic, and the date, 1156. Then followed the Doge's name, Vitale Michaeli, who, by the way, was one of the many rulers of the State who had been massacred.

"Here is the boundary," said the officer. "That road," he continued, "leads to Padua ; and that," pointing to a dangerous looking narrow path, "to Dolo, a village a league distant, and where, no doubt, you will find shelter."

Without another word he remounted, and, giving the signal to his men, they rode briskly away, and were immediately lost in the mist.

The daughter threw herself into her father's arms, and burst into a flood of tears—not tears forced from her by despair, but by joy, intense joy, that her beloved parent was locked in her arms, free, unshackled, and breathing no longer the foul air of a dungeon with the prospect of torture or death.

"My beloved child," exclaimed the father, as he pressed her to his heart, "how grateful ought I to feel towards the Divine Power that has not only spared my life but restored me my child."

"Ah!" exclaimed Agnes, "we are now together. Let us forget the past. But come, father, let us move on from this dreary swamp. We shall arrive, perhaps, at some friendly cottage, where we can rest for the night."

As the fair girl spoke, the tramp of horses' feet was heard, sounding dull and heavy on the turf-like soil.

"Some travellers," said the Signor Alviano, as Agnes caught her father's arm in an agitated manner, and strove to gaze through the fog in the direction of the sound. Then ensued the jingle of arms ; and the next moment six horsemen, with a masked rider leading, came rapidly into view.

With a cry of terror Agnes grasped her sire's arm, as the man in the mask alighted from his horse ; and throwing the visor from him, revealed to the horror-stricken father and daughter the features of him they had known as Mocenego the spy.

"So, Signor Alviano, you supposed you had escaped the toils so skilfully spread to ensnare you ? With Andrea Passarini you have done. But," he added, as he strode close up to the paralyzed father and child, "you have not yet settled with me."

"Villain ! treacherous spy of an accursed power that God will yet root from the face of the earth ! what have I to say to thee ? Have you not forged, and lied, and perjured yourself a thousand times over ? Have you not for gold sold your body and soul ? Villain ! what more do you want with me ?"

And the old man drew his emaciated form upright. With one arm encircling his child, he repelled with the other the approach of the wretch, who gazed upon him with eyes sparkling with the rancorous hatred of his wicked heart.

Uttering a laugh of fierce mockery, the villain repeated,—
“What want I with you? Oh, foolish old man! and so you knew me not, and thought I bartered body and soul for gold. No, dreamer, know me better.”

And dashing his low beaver to the ground, he raised from his forehead the false hair he wore, and rubbed his hands violently across his face. He then fixed his gaze upon the merchant.

“Mussato! Guido Mussato, the poisoner and assassin!” slowly burst from the pale lips of Alviano; while Agnes, with flashing eyes and erect form, stepped between her sire and his deadly enemy.

“Man!” ejaculated she, “you dare not touch my father. Stand back! we are no longer——”

“Away, girl,” interrupted Mussato, catching Agnes by the arm, and rudely pushing her towards two of the men, whom he motioned to draw near. “You will be provided for. My vengeance has now to be satisfied.”

And drawing forth a stiletto, he advanced upon Alviano.

With a wild shriek that rang through the still air, Agnes burst from the hold of the men, and threw herself upon the villain, holding his arm as he was about to strike her parent, with a force that, for the moment, baffled him.

At that critical instant the notes of a bugle came loudly and clearly upon the air, and soon the tramp of horses was audible. Mussato struggled and shook the maiden from him; but as he did so he slipped, and again Agnes seized his arm; while the attendants, startled and alarmed, unsheathed their swords, and sought to remount their horses. The next instant, bursting through the fog, some twenty mailed riders spurred into the space. Their leader, at a glance, saw how opportune was his arrival—for Mussato had dashed Agnes to the ground and held the struggling Alviano in his grasp, having his dagger raised to strike, when a blow from the butt of a lance smote the villain to the earth, and released the overpowered merchant from his grasp.

“Ha, by St. Mark!” exclaimed the leader of the horsemen, “I am in the nick of time! *Corpo di Bacco!* this dense fog had nearly ruined all.”

Springing from his horse, he raised Agnes in his arms, Alviano sank on his knees beside his child, kissing her cold forehead, while tears fell fast down his emaciated cheek.

Agnes shuddered. She opened her eyes, and they rested upon those of the stranger. With a cry of joy, she overcame her weakness, and seized the hand that supported her, saying,

"Oh, father, beloved father, we are saved ! Look ! Do you not recognize our deliverer ?"

The old man looked up ; and then he beheld the well-remembered features of Count Michaello Steno, looking down upon his daughter with deep emotion.

While this recognition took place, the armed riders had coolly surrounded and disarmed the six attendants of Mussato, who, as he recovered his recollection, found himself held by two of the armed men.

"Dear lady," said Steno, tenderly supporting Agnes, "I was but just in time. Five minutes later, and I should never have forgiven myself. But in truth, Alviano," he continued, pressing the old man's hand, "this dense fog misled us. But now, no matter. Nay," he added, smiling, "explanations will come time enough. Here is a litter." And he led his liberated friends towards a horse-litter which had just that moment arrived. "Let me see you both in, and then I will settle my account with that most accursed villain——"

Agnes cast an imploring look at the count, saying, "Leave him, count, to the judgment of God. His punishment will surely follow."

"True, dear Agnes," calmly, though firmly, returned the count ; "but, before that, this reptile may do further mischief. His time is come !"

Father and daughter looked at each other. The old man, regardless of all he had suffered from the villainy of Mussato, strove to induce the count to leave the wretch to the punishment of his own conscience.

"My dear friend," said Steno, drawing the curtains of the litter, "that miscreant must no longer burden the earth. He would never rest—for the devil has full possession of his heart—and were I to spare him, he would track us like a hound, and never cease till he had satiated his vengeance on you or yours. Me he has deeply injured."

Closing the curtain, he motioned to the conductors to move on. As the litter became lost in the mist, Count Steno advanced to where his armed men held the prisoners. Mussato stood with livid and ghastly face and eyes glazed and sunken. Terrible was the agony of his guilty soul, now that the hour of retribution had arrived. He knew the character of Count Steno too well to doubt for a moment the doom that was before him.

Close by the side of the road stood a decayed elm, stretching its withered branches over the dark, discoloured water beneath. Steno's eye rested upon this tree as he advanced ;

then, facing the miserable Mussato, he fixed his stern glance upon him.

"Most infernal villain!" said the Count, "if ever a prayer passed your lips, say one now. I give you three minutes; after which you die—die like a dog, suspended from yon branch. The dark flood beneath will hold under its waters your vile carcase."

"My lord," exclaimed one of Mussato's attendants, bolder than the rest, "that signor," pointing to Mussato, "is the Count Passarini's confidential secretary. And if—"

"Ha, rascal!" returned the count, "keep your tongue quiet. Thank your stars that I want not to meddle with your worthless lives. Cowardly reptiles you are, and richly deserve the whip to your backs, to stand by as you did and see an innocent girl insulted and an old man nearly slain by this miserable wretch. Up with him! Let his polluted soul become the prize of the arch fiend that pants for it!"

The next instant Mussato swung from the branch of the elm, two of the men having passed their long horse-ropes over the branch.

One agonizing cry escaped the lips of the sinner. In a few minutes more the rope was cut, and the body fell with a heavy splash into the water beneath, which the next instant closed over it. A wide circle marked the spot, and then the troubled surface grew calm.

A smart breeze now arose, and then the fog began to move sluggishly from the face of the land; and as Count Steno ordered the men to be released, and threw himself on his horse, the sun broke through the misty vapour, casting its misty rays over the swamp, and giving life and cheerfulness to the before dreary scene; for, beyond the marsh, the green woods of Dolo and Antoli, and the green pasture lands bordering the Paduan territory on one side, were distinctly visible.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EXPLANATION.

We have, as briefly as possible, laid before our readers the causes and the means through which the ruin of the Alviano family was effected. Perhaps it might be thought that too great a liberty has been taken with the government of Venice at that period; and that the confiscation of property and condemnation to banishment of a man perfectly innocent of crime must be improbable. But so to conclude would be wrong. The reader of Venetian history will find, in almost every chapter, cases similar, as far as innocence is concerned, but far more

terrible in judgment and punishment. We mention three or four, probably well known to some readers : such as the deep tragedy of the two Foscari ; the fearful persecution of the Carrara ; the torture and death that followed the conspiracy of Cueva, when numbers, perfectly innocent, perished, being hung on the red columns or drowned in the lagunes. Of a tribunal whose chief elements were secrecy and terror, little that is positively authentic is known. The penalties which this tribunal inflicted were left entirely to themselves, and often extended to death, either by secret or public execution. Their dungeons were under leaden roofs, or beneath the level of the canals. As a clever writer of Venetian history says :—

“ Never did the principle of ill establish so free a traffic for the interchange of crime, so unrestricted a mart in which mankind might barter their iniquity. The statutes of the Venetian Inquisition of State, now exposed to the general eye, exceed every other product of human wickedness, in premeditated, deliberate, systematic, unmixed, undissembled, flagitiousness.”

Steno had long been aware that he was looked upon with suspicion, and that the family of the late Doge and that of his widow were secretly determined on his ruin. The count found it would be a vain struggle on his part ; for some time back he had carried on a correspondence with his relative, the Lord of Padua, who, though seemingly in intimate alliance with Venice, secretly favoured the views of Louis of Hungary. In one of Carrara’s letters to Steno he strongly advised him quietly to leave Venice, for he had certain information that his (Count Steno’s) destruction was planned.

Steno deliberated but a very short time. He was not a man of much property in Venice ; but he inherited from his mother’s uncle a very handsome estate near to the Lake of Garda, and the very large fortune he received with his wife was secretly invested in other states. This was the grand point to which Count Steno was to owe his downfall. But, encouraged by the earnest entreaties of his wife, who trembled at the crisis she perceived was rapidly approaching, Count Steno suddenly withdrew from Venice, and giving out that he had retired into the Roman States, quietly took possession of the noble castle he possessed near Garda.

The Marchese Tiepolo, as we have seen, disgusted by the treachery exercised against his relative Alviano, and also aware that even he was looked upon with distrust, quitted Venice, and for some short time remained at Padua, but finally purchased a fine property within a very short distance of his son-in-law.

The tender-hearted Paulina never ceased to mourn over the loss of her beloved Agnes, and implored Count Steno, who possessed secret means of knowing how affairs went on in Venice, to exert himself, and, if possible, discover whether Alviano and his daughter still lingered in the dungeons of St. Mark; if not, to trace whither they had gone.

With all his early faults, Steno had a truly generous heart. He faithfully promised Paulina not to rest till some intelligence of Alviano or his child should be obtained. Amongst the officials and jailers of San Marco were two men who owed, not only their lives, but their situations under the Government, to the count. We do not, thank God ! always meet with ingratitude for favours conferred ; and these individuals were grateful, even when it was no longer in the power of Count Steno to befriend them. To these men he now applied, and through no less an agent than Caffagiola, the Venetian bravo.

At length, through the above instrumentality, Steno gained an insight into Passarini's plans with respect to the Signor Alviano : and, finally, he received a letter stating the hour when Alviano and his daughter were to depart from Venice ; also the exact spot on which they were to be left.

The delight of Paulina knew no bounds.

"We shall meet again," exclaimed the delighted girl, tendering the count a thousand thanks for his successful exertions.

Still, Steno would, in the end, have arrived at the place much too late, but for a letter, containing a few lines, and signed "Caffagiola." The lines were as follow :—

"The fate of Alviano and his child is sealed, unless you are on the spot *previous* to their arrival at the boundary. They are confided by Passarini to the care of that villain Guido Mussato, known as Mocenego. Alviano dies by his dagger, and his child's ruin is planned.

"Fail not, on your life.

"CAFFAGIOLA."

The kind-hearted Venetian conducted the now happy father and daughter to his mansion on the Lake of Garda, where, in peace and happiness, and in the society of her dearly-beloved Paulina, Agnes Alviano was as happy as a heart still beating fondly in memory of her lost lover would let her. She, nevertheless, did not abandon the hope that some tidings of him would yet come to light ; and, in that expectation, Alviano also still corresponded with a merchant in Genoa, once settled in Byzantium before the war broke out with Venice ; for the father of Agnes could not divest his mind of the idea that Paoli was entrapped into the power of his bitter enemies the

Genoese. He also wrote letters to his bankers in Florence and Pisa, with full instructions, in case the lost Paoli should make his appearance there. Last of all, he sought out a trusty messenger, who was sent with letters to his brother, the Marchese Damari. In these letters he gave a brief outline of his misfortunes, and expressed an ardent desire to return to his native land, and dwell there in peace and tranquillity with his beloved child. He blessed that merciful Providence which had preserved his only child, when, apparently, no earthly power could.

All these things being done, the Signor Alviano waited, in tranquil happiness, the return of his messenger.

We will now, in our next chapter, return to Giacinto Paoli.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BRAVO.

Our hero, after the tragical termination of his adventure with the Count Passarini, returned to the locanda, and made preparations for quitting Venice the following evening. Juliano was to hire a fishing-boat to take them to Chiozzi, and to sail after sunset.

In thinking over the conversation he had had with Passarini, he was fully inclined to credit what the count said with respect to the banishment of Alviano, who, of course, was accompanied by his daughter. If such was the case, intelligence would, no doubt, be had of his residence from his bankers in Pisa. Though Paoli had recently passed through that city, he had made no inquiries ; for he fully expected to find the merchant and his daughter in Venice.

The death of Passarini troubled the Corsican but little. There was no question but that he had, all his life, been a bad and vicious man ; and, in the last hour of his existence, he had attempted assassination. Had the Corsican been aware of all the crimes he had committed, he would have rejoiced that the world was rid of so superlative a villain.

It was late on the following day when our hero awoke. In fact, he was roused only by the hasty entrance of Pulini into his room, and saw by his countenance that something unusual disturbed him.

“ What’s in the wind now, my worthy squire ? ” demanded Giacinto, as he quickly dressed himself. “ I did not fall asleep till dawn, and I see it must now be near mid-day ! ”

“ I wish to heaven, signor, we had attempted to find our way last night through the channel to Chiozzi. ”

"Why, what's the matter?" One would think San Marco had been swallowed by an earthquake."

"Would to St. Nicholas it was, signor, with every one of its inmates, masked and unmasked; though, for the matter of that, every face in this infernal city wears a mask, whether covered with black crape or not. A precious tumult there is in the place! Groups of Venetians are talking eagerly on every spot where a group can stand in this water-built city. Officials and soldiers are searching every house. All the gondoliers and fishermen are stopped and examined. The fact is, that the gondoliers of, you know who"—and even Pulini looked round as if he expected to see an officer of St. Mark standing at his elbow—"have got back early this morning, and related their story; and the whole of the magistrates, from the Council of Ten down to a mere sbirri, are struck into a heap with amazement and no little terror."

"Well," very coolly replied the Corsican, "that is only what I expected. Of course, as soon as it was daylight they hailed the first boat passing; and what else but amazement must be felt at the disappearance of a ruler of Venice, and in such a mysterious way, for of course they have not found his body? We shall leave Venice to-night, and there will end your troubles."

"By the mass, signor, you take it very easy. You may depend on it that the officers of St. Mark will search every locanda in the city. All foreigners are to be examined. Should they take us—though no suspicion can be attached to us in reference to the disappearance of this cursed count—yet, as men returned from banishment, they would think nothing of hanging us from those infernal old columns. The count's son," continued Pulini, "is frantic, they say. I heard several Venetians conversing below with our host. They report every gondolier and fisherman is to be examined as to where he passed the night, and he will be forced to give proofs that he speaks truth."

"Where is Juliano?" demanded Paoli, anxiously.

"Gone to bed till night, signor. If we escape till dark, he will have a boat at a certain spot, and will come here for us. As to our host, he is in an agony for—"

At that moment the door slowly opened, and the round, bald head and pale face of the Signor Servite showed itself. He then entered and closed the door.

"Signor, signor, this is a frightful business! The officers are searching every house for strangers and foreigners. They will discover you, signor; and though innocent of this horrible murder, you will be known as an exile returned without leave

The saints preserve us ! What's to be done ? They'd think nothing of—Lord preserve us ! of hanging your worship."

" Well, that would not be pleasant, certainly, my worthy host," returned the Corsican, very coolly, though somewhat puzzled to know what to do. " Have you no hiding-place in this old mansion till night-fall ? Juliano is going to hire a boat to take us away this night, for I find I cannot do anything further in the business that caused me to incur the risk of coming here."

" Yes, signor, I have a hiding-place," returned the landlord ; " but it is a marvellously small closet, built into a thick wall. You certainly, signor, cannot stand up in it."

" *Corpo di Mondi !*" exclaimed Pulini, eagerly, " never mind that ; better to knel in safety than hang by the neck with plenty of room to kick your heels. Show us the place."

" It's in this very room, signor," responded the host, rubbing his hands, " and you couldn't find it if you tried."

" So much the better, *amico*, so much the better," returned the squire.

With Pulini's assistance the host drew back the heavy couch, and, moving aside the faded tapestry that hung round the room, showed the knight and his squire a plain and apparently solid wall of oak panels in squares. Pressing his heel on what appeared to be the head of a bolt, he pressed inwards with his hand one of the large squares, and Paoli observed a narrow space cut out of the solid wall high enough for a man of middle size, but considerably too low for the Corsican. It would hold four or five persons, but had a very uninviting appearance. Paoli looked within, and perceived that air was admitted from the top through a grating.

" Signor," said the host, with a sigh, " I had that very place constructed to hide my poor brother in ; and during two years, at different periods, he successfully escaped all the efforts of the *sbirri* of St. Mark to capture him. He had a wooden-leg, signor. Hark !" exclaimed the landlord, " I hear some one calling me. Put all your things in there in readiness. Let the bed stand against the wall. This room is in a long corridor with four doors. I will lock them all, for fear there might be an officer below now. When you hear me unlocking the door, if I do so twice, as if the bolt had slipped, get in there. All you have to do is to press back the panel and it catches in the spring."

" Signor Servite," exclaimed voices in the corridor, " you are wanted."

Away went the host.

"By the mass, signor," remarked Pulini, "he never told us how to get out."

"Oh, as to that," remarked Paoli, laughing, "if there is no other way, a blow will smash the panel. But let us put away our mails and our swords, though, in truth, I do not admire being caught like a rat in a hole."

However, through the management of their host, Paoli and his squire remained throughout the day undisturbed. The shades of night began to spread over the city.

The Signor Servite was amply rewarded by the Corsican for his services and kindness. The night was not exactly the kind of one to select for concealment, for it was bright and clear. No moon threw her silvery light over the canals and palaces of Venice, but millions of sparkling stars shed a clear mild light upon all around, save where the dark shadows of the stately palaces hid every object on which they fell.

Juliano arrived at the appointed time. His manner was hurried and agitated.

"Signor," said he, "lose not a moment. Something new has occurred. A fresh set of officers are, at this moment, making more strict investigations in all the locandas. I greatly fear the possibility of passing out of the Grand Canal without being questioned. You must submit to be covered over with nets and fishing gear."

"Lead on, Juliano," responded our hero. "We must trust to Dame Fortune and our own wits."

After bidding adieu to the Signor Servite, who, in honesty of heart, wished them every success in escaping, the worthy landlord devoutly crossed himself, and muttered an "ave!"—whether for his own escape or that of his guests must remain a secret.

As they passed out they heard the voices of Juliano and another man in angry conversation.

Paoli had nearly reached the destined spot appointed by the gondolier, when an officer of St. Marco, followed by six inferiors, ascended from a flight of steps, having just landed from a gondola. It was utterly impossible to turn back; for they met face and face. Pulini whispered,—

"We are lost if we do not turn back."

"To do so would betray us," returned Paoli. "If they accost us, say nothing. Let me speak. They can only know that we are foreigners."

The next moment the chief officer stepped up to our hero, and in a polite tone said,—

"You will excuse me, signor, if, in doing my duty, I delay

you a short time. I must request you to answer one or two questions."

"Well, sir," returned the knight, very calmly, but politely, "I shall be happy to answer any questions I think fit to reply to. But I will thank you to be quick, as I have an appointment of consequence."

The officer, as he ran his eyes over the person of the knight, critically and keenly, said,—

"You are a foreigner, signor, I perceive. May I request your name and place of abode?"

Giacinto Paoli felt his cheek glow as he replied,—

"You must excuse my giving my name, but my place of abode is the 'Dalmatian Arms.' I could, if I pleased, give you any name, but, for certain reasons, I wish to keep my own secret, and scorn to give you a false one."

"Very well, signor," replied the officer, "I will not now compel you to give your name; but you must return with me to your locanda, as my directions are to place all foreigners under strict surveillance for twenty-four hours."

As the officer turned to speak with one of his men, Pulini whispered,—

"If you return, you are lost. Swim the canal, and make your way to the Piazzetta San Marco. I will go for Juliano. They will be so intent on you that I shall not be minded."

"Will you be pleased to follow me?" said the officer, turning round, after motioning to his men to follow with the gondola.

Giacinto made no reply; but moved on, rapidly revolving in his own mind the advice of Pulini, and quickly concluding that its adoption offered his only chance of escape.

There was no bridge across the narrow canal for near a quarter of a mile, and before the boat could pull up he would be across.

Unbuckling his sword, and casting off his mantle, he looked, as well as the faint light would admit, along the opposite causeway of the canal. Not a human being appeared. There was a flight of steps nearly opposite.

Having made those observations, he suddenly, to the amazement of his escort, dropped his cloak, took his sword between his teeth, leaped in, and in a few moments, while the surprised officers shouted for the gondola to row up, gained the steps. Having landed, he shook off some of the superfluous water that dripped from him, and then, without knowing whither he was going, hurried along the causeway at a rapid pace.

Unfortunately the night-watch, consisting of three men,

were attracted by the shouts of the officers, and seeing our hero hurrying along, hastened to oppose his passage. The experiment proved a dangerous one to the foremost guard, for a blow from the strong arm of the knight, who felt unwilling to use his sword, struck the man down. Then, catching the second in his grasp, he hurled him over the brink into the canal. The third adopted the wisest course, and beat a retreat.

Turning into a narrow dismal-looking street, the fugitive's path was suddenly barred by a tall, muffled figure, who, as Paoli drew his sword, exclaimed,—

“ Signor, follow me, or your life is not worth a ducat. This causeway ends in a high impassable wall. I mean you well, Signor Paoli. Hesitate, and you are lost.”

“ Lead on, then,” ejaculated the knight; “ my case admits of no choice.”

“ You may safely trust me, signor; follow !”

And the stranger dived beneath a low dark archway.

Though the Corsican followed the stranger's quick steps without any apparent reflection, such was not the case. In moments of extreme danger, a resolute and determined mind reflects rapidly. Paoli's situation was a very critical one. To hesitate, was to fall into the hands of the officers of St. Mark; whereas, in following the stranger, who so singularly recognized him, he calculated, if he proved false, he would have but one to contend against.

Such being the decision of the knight, he dived beneath the archway after the stranger, who pushed open a door at the end of the avenue.

Paoli now observed that they were proceeding along one of the narrow and broken causeways which, in the inferior quarters of the city, ran along the sides of the narrow and dirty canals intersecting that region. The locanda he had left was situated in a retired and most unfashionable quarter of the city; and he perceived they were plunging amid the narrow, dirty causeways of that part of Venice inhabited by the lowest order. Crossing several narrow bridges, and passing only two or three individuals, his guide suddenly emerged from a dark entry into an open space. One or two stately but dilapidated edifices showed that this quarter, though apparently but thinly inhabited, and only by the poorer class, had once been tenanted by wealthy people. Into the entry of one of those edifices his guide now entered, desiring Paoli, in a low voice, to follow, and adding that their place of safety was before them.

Wondering who his tall conductor might be, and how he became so well acquainted with his name, our hero did as he

was bidden. A key was applied to a massive portal, and, the door being thrown open, the fugitives entered the dark passage within. The door was then closed and locked. Instinctively Paoli laid his hand upon his sword, but a moment's reflection drove all thoughts of treachery from his mind ; and the unknown said, in a deep but not unpleasant voice,—

“ You are now as safe, Signor Paoli, as if you stood upon your native soil.”

“ It may be so, stranger, and I thank you for your good services, which I trust to be able to reward ; but, *per Bacco*, I should feel more at home with a foot upon the land of Corsica. Can we have light ?”

“ In a moment, signor, and even a change of attire ; for, of course, you are wet from heel to head.”

“ His guide then struck several distinct knocks against a door, when a low and gentle voice, like that of a child, said,—

“ Is that you, padre ?”

“ Are you asleep, my child, that you do not know my signal ? Open.”

Several well-oiled bolts were drawn back, and then Paoli's guide pushed in the heavy door, and a faint light came from within. They entered, and the knight cast a curious and anxious gaze around. They were in a large and well-furnished chamber, containing a bed in one corner. Sundry garments hung along one wall, and weapons of various kinds ornamented another. A fire was smouldering on a once splendid marble hearth ; but what most attracted the Corsican was a half-dressed boy, about eight or nine years of age. The child turned his fine dark eyes anxiously and inquiringly upon Paoli, who looked upon his mild countenance with singular interest.

“ Throw on some wood, Guido, my boy,” said the stranger. “ Put the lamp down and get thee to bed.”

Then, taking off his heavy mantle, and laying aside his slouched beaver, he turned round and faced the Corsican.

To Paoli he was an absolute stranger—apparently a man between forty-five and fifty, with prominent and remarkable features. He was rather handsome than otherwise ; but an air of rooted sorrow seemed to be the perpetual expression that sat upon his features.

“ You had better take off your wet garments, Signor Paoli,” said the stranger, taking down a suit of plain attire, such as were generally worn by thriving citizens. “ You, perhaps, are curious to know whom you are to trust ; but I greatly fear my name will not inspire confidence. Nevertheless, you need not entertain any distrust. In Venice I am known as Caffagiola the Bravo.”

Paoli looked fixedly and calmly in the face of this dreaded individual ; but betrayed neither surprise nor disgust.

"Within the last few moments I suspected as much," returned our hero ; "and now you have told me your name, which I conjecture is only an assumed one, I feel even more confidence in my safety."

"And yet," returned the Bravo, with a melancholy, but pleased smile, "I have, at different times, received some heavy purses as bribes to take your life."

"By the mass," you surprise me, returned Paoli, very quietly changing his garment. "I knew not I possessed so valuable a life ; but, Caffagiola—if so I must style you—I am in extreme anxiety concerning my squire, and a gondolier known to you, one Juliano Verbano. Can anything be done for them ?"

"Juliano is my nephew, signor. Of him there is no fear. To the safety of your squire I will look by-and-bye ; but, depend upon it, Juliano has taken him to his secure place of refuge. Those garments, signor, I see were never intended for a man of your stature ; but this fire will dry your own in a very short time."

Seeing Paoli's attention caught by eight or ten poniards, of antique and singular make, the bravo said, "you look doubtfully at those weapons, Signor Paoli. But, believe me, they have never been stained by the blood of a fellow-creature while in my possession. Signor," he added, in a deep and affecting tone, "I have, in truth, been more sinned against than sinning. In one word, I will partly solve the riddle—but, alas ! there is even more abhorrence in owning the designation I am about to mention than in the name of Caffagiola the Bravo—I am, signor, SPY OF THE COUNCIL OF TEN."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE OFFICER OF ST. MARK.

WHEN Caffagiola openly announced himself as a spy of the Council of Ten, Giacinto Paoli started to his feet with a look of utter disgust and even abhorrence fixed upon the striking features of his preserver, who bore, without shrinking, the gaze of the knight. His muscular figure was erect, and his dark eyes met those of our hero with a steady look. "A spy !" echoed the Corsican ; "and of that iniquitous and cruel tribunal ! How is this ? You have apparently saved my life, and yet—if not a traitor to that accursed power you serve—you perplex me."

"Because, signor," slowly and calmly replied the Bravo, "you have yourself struck down the power that held me body

and soul. The chain is broken," he added, passionately, "that for years held this body in thrall. Spy I was—Bravo also to all who knew me not. But with the last breath of that fiend Passarini perished the infamous titles of bravo and spy."

And the broad chest of the man heaved with the deep emotion that struggled within it. "Signor," he added, more calmly, "call me no more Caffagiola the Bravo. The name I bore in my youth was an honest though an humble one. I resume it—for Passarini is dead. My name is Luca Manifesto."

"How know you that Passarini is no more?" demanded Paoli, extremely astonished at the strange manner and impressive words of his companion.

"Half an hour before I encountered you, signor, on the causeway Lommelini, I beheld the body, stark and stiff, of him that was once Count Luigi Passarini, one of the mighty Ten. The corpse was found by some fishermen entangled in their nets, near upon the adjoining islet. A deep fracture was on the back of the head. When I beheld that man's lifeless body, a thrill of wild joy shot through my heart—for years of bondage were broken—and I vowed, even at the sacrifice of my life, that I would save him who had freed the earth of that scourge. I was hastening to the 'Dalmatian Arms' to bring you here, signor, when I so happily encountered you."

"You are nevertheless mistaken, Luca," calmly replied the Corsican: "I was not the slayer of Passarini. It was the hand of God. He thought to stab me, but the chain mail beneath my garment frustrated him. You may see," pointing to the steel shirt he had taken off, and which lay upon a chair, "two links broken—for the assassin struck hard. In his haste to step back, he fell forcibly against the sharp iron pin in his own gondola, and, the boat heeling, he went overboard, and sank, I suppose, from the blow rendering him senseless. But you astonish me," continued Paoli. "How knew you that I was in Venice, and that I was present at that man's death?"

"You wronged me, signor," returned the Bravo, "when you supposed I thought your hand slew this councillor of St. Mark. How he died I certainly did not know, further than that he was found beneath the same waters to which his malice and avarice have sent many a victim. I meant that you were, without doubt, the cause of his death, let it happen how it would; for I knew that you, your squire, and Juliano, left Venice for the purpose of forcing the count to declare what was the fate of the Signor Alviano and his daughter. I knew, signor, you were in Venice two hours after your arrival here.

You look astonished, Signor Paoli. Alas ! you forget I was a spy of San Marco. As such, strange as it may appear to you, nothing in Venice passed without my knowledge—hundreds of spies are dispersed through the dwellings of the noble and the ignoble. Not a locanda in Venice is without its spy. Honest Signor Servite little thinks that in his head domestic he feeds a spy, an agent of mine—for all those of the locandas communicate with me, and I communicated only with him who now stands judged before his Maker. Your conversation was overheard by Marco, the valet that served you under the roof of Signor Servite ; and it was detailed to me too late, Heaven be praised, to report that night. Twenty-four hours were yet to run before my time came to meet Count Luigi ; and before twenty had expired *he* was dead, and *I* was free. But, signor, there is yet much to be done. To the officers and rulers of Venice I am still Caffagiola, the bravo and spy. You must trust me implicitly, signor ; for difficult will be the task to clear you, myself, and your attendants of this cursed city. I expect every moment, in this very chamber, an officer of San Marco."

Paoli sprang to his feet, with an expression on his countenance of distrust ; at least, the Bravo thought so—for he continued, in a somewhat mournful tone of voice—

"Fear not, signor ; you may trust me. Guido, my child, quick, dress yourself."

Opening a cupboard, he took out a goblet and a flask of wine.

"Take a glass of this, signor : no better in the ducal palace. I must remove these things of yours, and then show you where you are to retire while I receive the officer of St. Mark. My child, my only tie on earth, goes with you. If you hear one word that sounds like treachery to you, my child—"

"Nay, man," interrupted Paoli, in a voice of great emotion, "if thou wert ten thousand times my betrayer, not one hair of that child would I hurt to save a dozen lives. No, Caffagiola, or Luca ; there is my hand. I freely trust you, and, should we escape from this infernal city, demand of Paoli aught in his power to do, and he will do it."

"I shall ask a favour," calmly, but with deep emotion, returned the Bravo, pressing the manly hand extended to him ; "not, signor, for myself, but—" and he looked fondly and devotedly towards the child, who had quickly dressed and come towards them—"but for him."

"I guess your wish, Luca," said the Corsican, tenderly taking the child upon his knee. "Little Guido shall have a second father in Giacinto Paoli."

The Bravo gazed for a second with delighted tenderness upon his boy, who was looking, evidently pleased, into the handsome and gentle countenance of the knight. Then, passing his large muscular hand across his eyes, he hastily turned, removed the attire of Paoli, and locked it within a press. Taking up the Corsican's sword, he said—

“Now, signor, for your hiding-place. The hour is come.”

Advancing towards the panelled wall of the chamber, he touched a secret spring: the panel flew back, revealing a neat and commodious chamber, hung round with tapestry. A small couch, a couple of chairs, and a table, were its furniture. On the wall hung an exquisite image of our Saviour, beautifully carved in ivory. On the table lay a large, handsome-bound book and a wax candle. He had scarcely time to light this when three distinct knocks were heard at the outward door.

Laying Paoli's sword on the table, Luca Manifesto, or the Bravo, as we shall still call him, placed his finger on his lips, and stepped without the panel, which slid noiselessly into its place. The child, with its little finger to its mouth, sat down on a stool at the feet of our hero, laying its head on the knee of Paoli, who looked thoughtfully down upon the young face. His mind was rambling into the past, and wondering who and where was the mother of the fair boy before him, when heavy steps in the outer room, and a rough, hearty voice speaking to the Bravo, caused him to turn his thoughts into another channel.

“Pleasantly employed, Caffagiola,” said the officer of St. Mark, evidently helping himself to the wine left on the table.

“Body of the Doge! Where do you get your wine? It's magnificent.”

“You are welcome to as much as you can drink of it, Jacomo,” replied the Bravo. “As to its goodness, the cellars of Count Passarini were always famous.”

“*Corpo di Bacco*, you have lost a powerful protector, Caffagiola,” returned the officer. “Nevertheless, you are in possession of so many of our rulers' secrets that you may be certain of retaining your present situation undisturbed.”

“But have you gained any intelligence,” demanded the Bravo, “as to the perpetrators of this strange and incredible deed?”

“That's just what I am come about,” returned the officer; “but sit you down, and bring another flask. I have much to say. Yes,” he continued, after a moment's silence, “I have discovered the murderer.”

Paoli bit his lip.

“You will scarcely believe who it is,” pursued the officer.

" You remember that Corsican who was concerned in the Faliero plot ? "

" Yes," replied the Bravo : " he was banished for three years. And you suppose it was him ? "

" Suppose ! There is no supposition in it. It's positive. The fishermen have just brought in the missing gondola of the count, which had drifted on to the shore beyond the Lido. In the gondola was found the scabbard of a most weighty sword."

Paoli recollected, the moment he had heard those words, having missed his scabbard, but he thought it had fallen into the lagune in stepping into the gondola.

" On this scabbard," continued the officer, " which was brought to the dead count's son, is a golden circle, whereon are engraved some strange characters. Underneath is a winged horse, and under that, the single word—Paoli. Thus, you see, Caffagiola, with all your penetration and all your power of discovery, you were wrong. This Corsican, Paoli, is the man who did the deed. Confess you have been baffled this time."

" Without a doubt," replied the Bravo. " And was it, think you, in mere revenge for being banished from Venice ? For now, I recollect me, the dead count was the main cause of the sentence of banishment being passed on him."

" No : the present Count Passarini says No. He is like one demented ; he swears he will move heaven and earth but this Corsican shall swing by the heels from the red columns, after first having his bones broken on the rack. You know, Caffagiola, the dead count rarely forfeited his word in these trifles ; and, body of the saints ! I can declare—who am the confidant of the son—he is no way behind his father. But I was saying it was not for revenge for his banishment that this daring foreigner committed this astounding crime."

" For what, then, in the name of St. Antonio ? " demanded the Bravo.

" Why, because the count caused the banishment of the wealthy merchant Alviano, to whose daughter this Corsican was betrothed. You see, he lost the girl and the wealth of the merchant."

" A very small portion of the wealth, Jacomo," replied the Bravo ; " only the palace he had purchased from the Pisani, and what it contained, and the sums owed him by the Government."

" There is one thing," said the officer of St. Mark, putting down his goblet with some force on the table, " that puzzles me. There is treachery somewhere, that's certain. I was one of the men chosen, with five others, by the count to follow.

with Tomaso Mocenego, the escort that had charge of the Signor Alviano and his daughter."

Hearing those words, the Corsican scarcely breathed. He was about to move nearer the panel, fearing to lose a word; but looking down, he saw that the child slept with his little head resting on his knee. The man spoke on. He lost no word that came from him, and what he did hear filled his heart with joy.

"Well, Caffagiola, they were left at the boundary-stone, and the escort returned. We then came up; our orders were to bring back the girl; for she, you know, the dead count intended for his son. When, just as the maiden was separated from her father—upon my conscience, Caffagiola, my heart relented when I heard the shrieks of the poor girl—suddenly, through the dense fog that lay upon the marsh so thick as almost to blind you, up rode a score of horsemen with a cavaliere at their head. The stranger struck down him who held the girl, and she flew into her father's arms. But that which strikes me with astonishment is, that Tomaso Mocenego was actually about to assassinate the Signor Alviano, when the stranger struck him down with the butt of his lance. *Diavolo!* I thought all was up with us. But this stranger, whoever he was, contented himself with hanging Tomaso to a branch of a decayed elm. He then placed the maiden and her father in a litter which came with them; and having released us, he rode gaily off on the high road to Padua. *Corpo di Juda!* The whole thing is a mystery to me."

"Yes, Jocomo, and must remain so. It was one of the dead count's secrets. But, as you say, there was evidently a betrayer of the count's plot. Tell me, for the night wears apace, what are the young count's orders?"

"Why, faith, Caffagiola, they were not either very polite or very complimentary; and I felt rather loath to come with them. Nevertheless, as you and I are old friends, and have helped each other at a pinch—being, you know, not quite so evil-minded as our masters—I give you a hint that this new count is not quite satisfied with you. In his rage, he said you were playing a double game; or else this event could not have taken place. He suspected that Paoli must have been some time in Venice, unknown to you; and bade me tell you, he gives you eight and forty hours to find and deliver up this Corsican; or else—excuse me, *amico*—he swore you should hang heels up from the red columns of St. Mark."

A loud and mocking laugh came to the ears of the listener, as the Bravo replied—

"The young cock crows loud, Jocomo; but he gives plenty

of time. I promise you I will find this Corsican in less than twenty-four hours."

"*Benissimo, benissimo*," returned the official. "Now come to him ; for he insists on seeing you this night. All the passes to these suburbs are strictly guarded. We know that the Corsican swam the canal leading hither, and that he knocked down three or four of the nightguard. Body of me ! he is a powerful man, and must be handled tenderly. But come along ; the flasks are empty, and we must be stirring."

After a moment or so, Paoli heard them move from the chamber, lock the door, and slam the heavy outer portal. All then became silent throughout the mansion.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE THREE SAINTS.

For nearly an hour our hero sat with the young boy reclining, fast asleep, in his arms, with a feeling of joy in his heart, to which for many a weary month it had been a stranger.

"Thank God," he mentally exclaimed, "my beloved Agnes is alive, safe, and, undoubtedly, with friends. I have at length obtained the clue I so anxiously sought. This strange being, to whom, certainly, I owe my life, may perhaps know more. It strikes me he may even know this masked cavalier, and where my Agnes now is."

In the midst of a thousand delightful anticipations, the child awoke, and lifting his expressive eyes to the face of the Corsican, he smiled, and said—

"You are very kind to nurse Guido, signor. Have I slept long ? Ah, I see, father has not come back yet."

"No, my boy, he has not ; you have not slept very long. But tell me, my poor child, are you often thus left alone to your little self in this dismal old house ?"

"Oh, no," returned the child. "I am not very often here ; but only come now and then, to see my dear papa, who loves me dearly."

"And where do you come from, Guido ?" questioned the knight.

The child smiled, and, looking in the Corsican's face, said—

"That is one of papa's secrets, and Guido always does what papa desires him, and he said—'Never tell strangers anything.' But you look so handsome, and so kind, that I think—indeed, I am sure—I might tell you."

"No, my child," said Paoli, "you must keep all papa's commands and wishes safe in your own little breast. You look

very sleepy, Guido. You must be tired. You shall go to sleep upon yonder couch, and I will watch over you like another papa."

Paoli persuaded the child to lie down, and covering him over, he was soon asleep.

Our hero sat down at the table, fell into a perplexing train of thought, and then insensibly into a deep slumber. He must have slept two or three hours, for, when he awoke, the grey dawn was stealing into the small chamber from a species of skylight of stained glass in the ceiling of the room. As Paoli awoke, he heard footsteps in the next chamber, and the moment after the panel shot back, and Caffagiola entered. His first glance was to the couch, on which still slumbered, in all the calmness and innocence of childhood, his little boy. A placid smile played over the Bravo's care worn features, as he saw how carefully the child had been put to rest, and, turning to Paoli, he said,—

"I fear, signor, you have found the hours pass heavily and drearily. But I could not return sooner."

"Nay," replied the Corsican, cheerfully, "I slept well. The intelligence I overheard from your friend, the officer of San Marco, relieved my mind of a vast weight which has oppressed me for many months."

"Yes, I can imagine the part you mean," responded Caffagiola. "I led to it purposely to relieve your mind, as I had not time to impart anything to you myself concerning those you risked your life to serve. But I have more to surprise you still ; though, first of all, let me assure you of the safety of your squire and Juliano. I saw them both, and told your attendant, who was in a state of intense anxiety, that you were out of the reach of persecution. I persuaded him to remain where he was ; for he insisted on my taking him to you."

"You have served me well and kindly, Luca," said Paoli. "I trust the day will come when I may requite it. How fared you with the young count ?"

The Bravo smiled, saying,—

"His threats to me, signor, were the mere vapourings of an angry boy. He has no power over me. I am still thought to be the slave of the Ten Rulers of Venice ; for the place of Passarini is already filled by a near connection of the Marchese Tiepolo. Still, our situation is critical ; for the most determined and vigorous search is making throughout Venice for your person. There is not a chamber in the city save this that could conceal you four hours. But come into the otherroom, signor ; and, while you are breaking your fast,

I will inform you of one or two circumstances that will surprise you."

The Bravo then placed upon the table a very respectable meal, consisting of cold fowls, tongues, and excellent wines. Little Guido soon joined them, and already much taken with the Corsican, would sit beside him.

"I have never," said the Bravo, "seen a victim hunted by the bloodhounds of San Marco with fiercer hate than you are sought after, signor. The death of Passarini has created as great a sensation in Venice as when Ubertino Carrara seized and gagged the senators, and carried them from Venice to his own city of Padua." *

"But how," demanded our hero, somewhat anxiously, "can we possibly baffle these bloodhounds? Even should I escape I will make some effort to clear my name of the stigma of murdering this Venetian senator."

"Had it not been for a fortunate coincidence," observed the Bravo, "much time must have elapsed before I could have effected your escape from this city. First, however, let me impart agreeable intelligence. Last night you overheard our conversation. You heard the official say that a masked cavaliere released the Signor Alviano and his daughter from the hands of that villain Guido Mussato, for that is or was his real name, a branded galley slave."

"Yes," interrupted Paoli; "most eagerly do I wish to know that generous cavaliere's name."

"You know him well, signor. Count Michaello Steno is the noble who rescued the merchant and his daughter."

"Count Steno!" echoed Paoli, with a start of astonishment and delight. "How on earth came Steno there? I thought he fled into the Roman States."

"No, signor, he possesses in the Paduan States considerable property, derived from his mother, who was one of the house of Carrara. He was living at Castle Baldo when I became acquainted with the vile treachery intended for the Signor Alviano's daughter. I sent him information of the plot; mentioned time and place; and the count saved them. No doubt at this moment they are safe and well under shelter of his roof. At all events, from him you will gain every intelligence, if we fortunately escape."

"You have preserved those dearer to me than life, Luca," said our hero, with much emotion. "I will say nothing now. Tell me, what is the coincidence upon which you count to effect our escape."

* Historical fact.—See Muratori.

“ If anything for a moment, signor, diverts the attention of the rulers of Venice from their mysterious policy, it is during the few hours occupied in some empty pageant or idle procession. You will scarcely credit that so subtle and crafty a government as Venice would not only sanction but actually be the director and promoter of the absurd ceremony that will take place to-morrow. Yet, strange to say, I myself was in Venice at the identical period when this miracle, which I am about to mention, took place. It is now twelve or thirteen years ago, and I knew the man well who beheld the marvel. Though he was an ignorant fisherman, his words were not only believed by the rulers of Venice, but during his life he was paid an annual pension ; and evcry year since, on the anniversary of that day, a most solemn and imposing procession takes place. This man died about four years ago ; and probably more individuals attended Tomaso Marcello to his last resting place than ever followed the funeral car of a Doge.”

“ You raise my curiosity,” said Paoli, taking little Guido, who looked as anxious for a story as any urchin of the nineteenth century, on his knee.

“ Thirteen years ago, signor,” resumed the Bravo, “ the waters of the lagune all of a sudden rose to a most unaccountable height. No tradition existed of their having ever reached within several feet of their then altitude. A tremendous gale from the north-east drove them back for several hours ; but when it ceased they rose higher and higher. On the second night of the flood the wind blew from the south ; and on that night old Tomaso Marcello was fastening his crazy boat for shelter close to the *riva di San Marco*. While so employed a figure approached him, and addressing him, said, ‘ You shall be nobly rewarded if you will ferry me over to San Giorgio Maggiori.’ ‘ *Diavolo !* ’ muttered old Tomaso ; ‘ do you think me mad ? do you not see what a night it is, and the waters so high ? Now the saints forbid. It were sinful to risk life.’ ‘ *Amico*, ’ said the stranger, mildly, ‘ your last exclamation is good. But why use the name of the enemy of mankind as the commencement of your remonstrance ? Be of good heart, friend. Unmoor your bark, and ferry me over. The saints will protect you.’ ”

“ Old Tomaso grumbled, but nevertheless he released his craft, and the stranger stepping on board, he pushed out into the troubled waters. The old man was astonished at the ease with which he pulled against the gale ; and to San Giorgio they got safe and sound. ‘ Wait, *amico*, and I will return presently,’ said the stranger, landing. In a few minutes he returned, and with him another stranger. ‘ Friend,’ said the

first stranger, 'row us now to San Nicolo di Lido.' Old Tomaso dropped his oars on hearing what he considered a most insane order on such a night; and the words *cento diavolo* were escaping his lips, when, just in time, he thought the same amount of saints better. He vowed his boat would never live to cross the lagune. 'Old man, do as thou art bid. The saints protect you, and you will be well rewarded.' Tomaso crossed himself, cast one look at the troubled waters, and again pulled out. San Nicolo was reached in safety, and there they were joined by a third individual. 'Now, friend,' said the first passenger, for he alone spoke, 'pull boldly for the two castles of the Lido.'

"Though the waves ran high, old Tomaso said, in relating his story, he never thought anything of them. He pulled away vigorously, and just as they drew nigh to the straits, he beheld, to his amazement and horror, a galley of immense size coming towards them, bowling along the surface of the lagune, and scarcely touching the white tops of the waves. The old man swore that this vessel was manned by a legion of fiends, who rent the air with their screams and yells, shouting, at the same time, that they were proceeding to sink the city of Venice in the waters that encircled her.

"The three strangers then stood up, each waving a huge crucifix in the air. They repeated some unknown words, and suddenly, with a terrific yell, and a sheet of fire illuminating the waters all round, the galley and the fiends disappeared, and the water became as calm as a mill-pool. 'Now, friend,' said the first stranger, 'you may put us each ashore where you took us up.' Tomaso crossed himself, took up his oars, and rowed to San Nicolo, thence to San Giorgio, and, finally, landed his first passenger where he had taken him in. The stranger was quietly walking away, when Tomaso humbly observed—bowing to the ground—that after all his night's work the sight of the miracle he had seen was but indifferent pay, especially as he had a family to feed.

"'You are right,' calmly returned the stranger, 'so it would to you. Go, friend, to the Doge and to the procuratore, and tell them that but for us three, Venice would this night have perished in the flood. I am St. Mark (Tomaso devoutly crossed himself); my two companions were St. George and St. Nicholas. Let the magistrates reward you. Also inform them that this flood has been caused by a schoolmaster at San Felice, who was mad enough to sell his soul to the enemy of mankind, and then added to his guilt by hanging himself.' 'If I tell such a story as this,' said Tomaso, who, by this time felt himself quite at home with St. Mark, 'it is most probable they will hang me. Neither the Doge nor the procuratore would believe me.'

‘Friend, thou art not without wit ;’ and taking a ring worth five ducats, he gave it to the fisherman, saying, ‘Give this ring to the magistrates. Tell them to look in my treasury—they will find it missing.’ Having thus said, the saint vanished.

“Tomaso found his way to the Doge next day. He related his story, and gave the ring. St. Mark’s treasury was searched ; the fisherman’s miracle being instantly authenticated, he was endowed with a pension ; and an annual procession, on a magnificent scale, was ordered to take place.

“Such, signor, is the origin of the grand procession that will take place to-morrow, and which will be followed by all Venice, high and low.”

“I have no doubt,” said Paoli, “that the fisherman acted under the orders of the Government. It was a masterly stroke of policy to redouble the faith of the people in their patron saint, which, perhaps, began to waver—seeing that the flood did not yield at once by prayers and offerings to St. Mark. But how will that assist us ?”

“Materially, signor. I was sent for last night, as you know, by the young Count Passarini. At first he attempted to threaten me for not having discovered you. I quietly informed him that I now served another master—that I was still under the protection of the rulers of Venice, and obeyed their orders ; still, it was my wish to serve him while obeying them. But I had no fear of his power, which was as nothing when opposed to the Council of Ten. ‘But,’ interrupted the count, though in a milder tone, ‘the slayer of my father will most probably get to a place of safety in the confusion and disorder of the city to-morrow during the procession, though I have surrounded that part of the city where he must be hiding with a strong force, who will examine every one leaving that quarter to-morrow to join the procession.’ ‘I am aware, signor,’ I quietly replied, ‘that he is in that quarter ; and I could almost swear to the spot of his concealment. My reward from the council will be great if I secure him.’ ‘I will double it, Caffagiola,’ exclaimed the young count, eagerly, ‘if you secure him.’ After expressing my gratitude, I said, ‘Rest satisfied, signor, he shall be in my hands before twenty-four hours have passed, if he has taken refuge in a certain locality where I strongly suspect he will be found. But much caution will be required. You know he is a powerful man—well armed ; and in the place of his retreat are a set of the most desperate and abandoned characters, who are mostly robbers on the lagune. These fellows may be bribed to take him across the lagune.’ ‘I have thought of that also,’ said the count. ‘There are six channels leading out of the lagune,’ I remarked. ‘You must station in

all these channels a barge, with eight or ten of the police of St. Mark in each. No boat to be allowed to pass for that day without a countersign. Let that be "St. Nicolo di Lido." Thus, if they do attempt to get out of the lagune, they will fall into a trap.' The council will do this, for I mentioned that that precaution was necessary during the ceremony of to-morrow. 'But I am certain,' I continued, 'of entrapping him before that. Send me to-morrow, to the canal beneath my residence, two hours before the procession assembles, four of the subordinate officers of the prison—they are under your control as their chief. Let them be well armed, and in a gondola, with four oarsmen ; and I promise you this Corsican signor shall be in my power.'

"Your plan is a good one, Caffagiola," said the count, and shall be followed to the letter. Take this purse,—giving me this (and the Bravo drew one well filled from his pocket, and cast it with an expression of disgust into an open chest near him). None of these bribes do I ever spend, signor—they all go into the hands of Padre Ignacio, for the benefit of the poor and destitute. Another time I will explain all this—now to let you fully into my mode of proceeding.

"To-night I will contrive to bring your squire and Juliano here. The spies of the count pay no attention to those *entering* this suburb—only those *leaving* it. Besides, I can bring them by water to the entrance of the vaults leading into this ancient mansion. To-morrow the count will send here four of the officers under his charge. We must then seize and confine them ; and, disguised in their garments, we may boldly proceed to the gondola they came in. Possessed of the countersign, we shall pass, without question, the guard-boat leading to Chiozzi. The men in the gondola will be under my orders, and will not dare to question the reason of our proceeding to Chiozzi. I shall then dismiss them with a note to the count, letting him know where he will find his officers."

"Your plan has every appearance of proving successful," said Paoli ; "for even supposing the countersign, by any chance, should be changed in the boats guarding the channels, we must force our passage. But what is to be done with little Guido here ? "

"I shall send him to his mother, signor, this night. Some time to-day, if you will not consider it an intrusion, I will briefly give you an outline of my life, which will explain to you many things that now appear mysterious. I have said, signor, that I am more sinned against than sinning. I pray you to judge."

"Most willingly will I listen to you, Luca," replied Paoli, for I feel singularly interested in your hard fate, condemned,

as it appears you are, to bear the abhorrent stigma of an assassin's name, without possibility of casting it off till death shall rid you of your tyrant."

"Otherwise, years, signor, might have passed," replied the Bravo, "till perhaps despair would have raised my hand against a life hateful to me to endure. In sooth, but for the soothing reasonings of Padre Ignacio perhaps the crime would have been committed."

The Bravo then proceeded to pack up some articles he wished to take with him, and to destroy others. Finally, all being ready, after preparing a repast for his guest, the Bravo, as the day was yet young, sat down and related to Paoli the few but dismal events of his early life.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE BRAVO'S STORY.

"To avoid oppression, signor," began the Bravo, "I quitted my native land, the valleys of the Tyrol. I was then two-and-twenty years old. My occupation was that of a hunter. I had been married some few months, and my spouse was the sister of Juliano's mother. My wife was gifted with a fatal beauty. I called it fatal, for it had been the cause of my crime, and of all our sorrows. She was not only beautiful, signor, but had the advantage of a convent education ; for her father was considered a tolerably rich landholder in those valleys. For a long time he refused his consent to our marriage ; but the conduct of our feudal lord gained me at last the hand of Mariana. Even after marriage, this lord's persecutions continued ; he endeavoured, and partly succeeded, in his vengeance, to ruin my father-in-law ; so, to save him and my wife, I fled the valleys and mountains I loved so well. At the end of two years, having spent most of my little store, we came to Venice. I purchased a gondola, and strove to support my wife and our two children. I did not like this occupation, and some time after, notwithstanding the entreaties and tears of my beloved wife, I shipped on board a galley as a soldier, and sailed with the fleet upon an expedition against a revolted colony. We were tempted into this expedition, which was not popular, by promise of high pay and share of the plunder of Zara. The war lasted two years ; and, being severely wounded, and unfit for service for some time, I was sent back to Venice with others. I was anxious enough to get home ; for I suffered from my wounds. By the merest accident, I encountered a countryman, who informed me that my persecutor had been killed in a boar hunt ; and that my father-in-law was still in exist-

ence, and well to do. This intelligence rejoiced me exceedingly. I was yet young, only six-and-twenty, and my wife scarcely twenty. I knew the delight she would feel in returning home to her native country.

“Before I left Venice to go to the wars I had established my wife and children in this very house—once a nobleman’s. But this quarter of the city had long been abandoned by the better class of citizens ; and many of its mansions had sunk into decay ; others were inhabited by the lower class of mechanics, and, latterly, by those who shun the light of day.

“On landing in Venice I eagerly sought my home. I walked with difficulty, for one of my wounds was in the hip. I need not describe my feelings to you, signor, when on reaching my house I found it shut up. My neighbours, who had never been friendly, informed me, and they spoke almost scoffingly, that one of my children had died, my wife—merciful Heaven ! they dared to say so to my face—had fled with a paramour, and that the other child, but for the generosity of the Marchese Tiepolo, who owned this house, would have perished of want.

“I leaned against the great pillars at the entrance of this mansion, as if turned into stone. I had no power to move. My neighbours, who looked upon me as a foreigner, left me without even a word of pity. Slowly I recovered my recollections. Not for one instant, signor, did I believe the vile tale of my neighbours. I knew my Mariana too well to doubt her faith or her love. ‘Here then again,’ thought I, ‘has her beauty been our curse.’”

The Bravo paused in his narrative ; and putting his hand beneath his vest, he drew forth a miniature set in a plain ivory circle.

“This resemblance of my wife, signor, was painted by a skilful but unfortunate youth, who in vain struggled with poverty and neglect, and died in a chamber in this house. I found him sick and ill one evening in the streets, and brought him here. He lived with us some months ; but he never could overcome the disease that had taken such powerful hold of him from his very infancy.”

Paoli took the miniature ; it was, in truth, sweetly and delicately painted ; and never, he confessed, not even excepting his own betrothed, had he seen so lovely a face.

“In sooth, Luca,” said he, “your Mariana was almost too lovely. How came you, so devotedly attached, to leave one so young and beautiful, and trust to the chances of war, when you could have earned sufficient as a gondolier to support you ?”

“ Alas, signor, the restlessness of the human race was strong in me. You know not the life of excitement and peril the Alpine hunter enjoys. From my earliest youth I gloried in the perils of the chase. To follow the chamois and the grisly bear amid the wild crags and glaciers of our mountains was my greatest delight. The monotonous life of a gondolier on these dismal canals disgusted me ; and, in a moment of weariness, I sailed on that expedition, which I certainly did not think would last beyond six months. But excuse this interruption—I will continue.

“ As soon as I recovered from the shock, I proceeded to the mansion of the Marchese Tiepolo, and saw that kind and noble signor. He gave me the address of the family where he had placed my little girl, and offered me every assistance ; but of course could give me no clue to the fate of my unfortunate wife. He pressed a purse into my hand, and said, in parting, that I must let him know how I got on, and to apply to him if I gained any tidings of my lost wife. ‘ You would be welcome,’ he said, ‘ to the mansion you formerly lived in ; but I have sold all my holdings in that quarter of the city. The Count Passarini purchased them, for what purpose I cannot conjecture, as they all paid little or no rent.’ I was bewildered, distracted, and broken-hearted. I succeeded in renting my old habitation from the Count Luigi’s steward ; for I loved the chamber that once held my wife. Before I could commence any inquiries I was seized with a fever, and left to the care of a wretched old woman, who neglected, and, finally, robbed and deserted me. During four long months I lay, sometimes in possession of my senses, at others raving like a maniac. At length my strong constitution conquered, and I rose from my couch of pain, gaunt and fearfully emaciated. I wandered out more like a spectre than a human being. My long black hair hanging in masses over my hollow checks, and my unshaven beard, gave me so hideous an appearance that my neighbours laughed at my ghastliness.

“ My wife had disappeared about four months before my return. In vain I sought for some trace of her. No clue whatever could I gain. Six months more passed, and I began to despair. Tormented in mind and body, I earned but little as a gondolier, for my spare, gaunt body and gloomy looks lost me many customers. Strangers are not liked in Venice. I was often told, in derision, to turn bravo, which, it was added, would suit me better than a gondolier’s occupation. How little, signor, can man judge by looks of the heart of his fellows ! At that period I would not have crushed a worm.

"Onc evening I had returned late from a wearisome pull to Fusina, and was mooring my boat in the dirty and narrow canal that runs through this quarter of the city, when I was suddenly accosted by a man wrapped in a long brown mantle, and a beaver much slouched over his face. 'I say, *amico*, do you belong to this quarter?' 'Yes,' I replied. 'Do you happen to know,' continued the stranger, as I stooped to fasten my chain and padlock, 'the house where one Luca Manifesto lives?' 'Yes,' I returned, 'I know the house well—but'—

"'Never mind buts, my man,' interrupted the stranger, 'if you know the house that's everything. There, don't fasten your boat. Keep her in readiness, and you shall have a job that will pay you well. Now come, and, first of all, point out the house.' Giving a shrill whistle, three other men, habited like the domestics of some lord, came out from the deep shadow of one of the houses. My heart beat with intense curiosity and anxiety. Here was some mystery with respect to myself; perhaps some clue to Mariana. 'Cospetto, signor,' I replied, unlocking my boat, 'I shall be glad of a job. Times are bad. If you follow me I will show you the house.'

"It was a dull, dark evening. I could not distinguish any of the strangers' features, but I led the way. As I approached the old palace which I occupied as a home, to my extreme astonishment I perceived a light from a lower window. I never left a light, my little girl being still with the same female who had taken charge of her. I was annoyed, for I was the sole inhabitant of the mansion. 'That is the house,' said I, 'where you see the light.' 'Good,' said the man who had first accosted me. 'There's earnest for you,' handing me a ducat. 'Go back to your boat, and be ready to take us aboard when we return to you.'

"I pretended to turn my back, but kept an eye on the movements of the strangers. As soon as I beheld them enter the passage, I stole after them, with strange thoughts flashing through my brain. The two doors leading to my chambers were both fastened; no one but myself and my wife knew the secret mode of entering the house, except the original owners; and death had claimed them long years back. The secret entrance was through the vaults. I stole quietly after the men, and heard one of them say, 'The door is a very strong one—the noise of bursting it open will alarm her, and her shrieks may rouse the inhabitants of this desolate and notoriously evil quarter of the city. I stayed to hear no more, for I felt in my heart that these strangers spoke of my wife. Who else could it be?

“ Wild with joy, fear, and anxiety, I rushed out of the passage, and flew rather than ran to the vaults ; and in despite of blows and bruises, squeezed myself through the long, narrow passage, and gained, through a secret trap-door, the interior of the mansion. As I did so I heard the crashing of timber, as if a mass of stone was hurled at the door ; and then a wild shriek from a female voice. I rushed to the panel, pushed it back, and leaped into the chamber. As I did so, the outward door flew into fragments.

“ Merciful Providence ! the first object my gaze rested upon was my long-lost wife ! She stood in the middle of the room. Her garments were torn, disordered, and covered with slime and mud ; her hair was dishevelled and hanging wildly about her ; her right hand grasped a knife. With a cry of intense joy she recognised me ; and in a transport of feeling, threw herself, almost senseless, into my arms. Clasping her to my heart, I at once extinguished the light, and sprang with her through the panel into another chamber. In my hasty entrance I had jammed the frame. No effort could close it ; and the next instant the door was burst open, and the strangers, carrying a lighted lantern, rushed in.

“ My wife lay perfectly helpless. She appeared reduced almost to a perfect skeleton—her weight was scarcely that of a child. I hurried along ; but a loud shout announced pursuit through the panel I could not close. Still, acquainted with the vaults, I kept ahead of my pursuers ; but, as we emerged from the vaults, the light of a torch flashed upon our persons, and then in truth the race for life began. I rushed across the ruins surrounding this mansion, and had nearly reached the brink of the canal where my boat lay. It was the third night of the memorable inundation, or rising of the lagune. The waters had been rapidly falling. I reached my moorings, and was unfastening my boat ; my wife, who was recovering the use of her senses, gazed wildly round, warning me that two of my pursuers were within a few steps of us. The foremost at once grappled with me. I let go my hold of Mariana, and catching him by the throat, hurled him at my feet. The next instant I felt the point of a stiletto strike into my side, but slightly. I caught the wrist of the assassin as he was about to repeat it, and wresting it from him in a transport of rage, I drove it to the hilt in his heart. ‘ Oh ! villain, murderer ! you have slain the count,’ exclaimed the other, as if horror-stricken, and stooping to raise the prostrate body. But I heeded him not ; Mariana had freed the boat ; and, just as the others came up, I got her into my gondola, and pulled off with all the force I was possessed of. ‘ Oh ! Luca, Luca,’ exclaimed my wife, ‘ pull for the lagune.

We can never return to Venice.' As I rowed swiftly on through the Grand Canal, and thence into the broad waters, I eagerly demanded of my wife who was the man whom they called count, for I had slain him. 'Oh Heavens!' responded she, 'though he richly deserves his fate, would to God that you had not slain him. It is the only son of the Marchese Gradinegro.' 'Gradinegro!' I repeated, 'then, indeed, there is no safety for us within leagues of Venice.'

"Our situation, Signor Paoli, was truly a fearful one. I did not possess four ducats in the world. The night was a stormy one: the wind came in fresh gusts across the wide waters, and I could hear the roar of the sea-surf as it beat furiously against the barriers of the Lido. By keeping out of the deep channels and inside the posts, I contrived to make way towards Chiozzi, where I resolved to land, sell the boat, and fly into Italy. The thought of my little girl distracted me; but my wife consoled me by saying, that when once beyond the territories of Venice it would not be difficult to get her back. It blew so hard, and the night became so dark, that I fastened my boat to one of the posts, and, covering my wife and self with the awning which I had taken down, I waited till dawn. Anxiously we passed the hours of darkness; we cared neither for the severity of the cold nor the splash of the short shallow sea as it broke over our low bark, nor for the desolation or poverty that was before us. One thought cheered us, and rendered the dark hours of that gusty night the happiest we had perhaps ever past. We were re-united when despair had seized our hearts.

"My wife's story was soon told. Returning home late one evening, after purchasing some necessaries, about four months before my return from sea, she had just entered upon the waste ground, when a mantle was thrown over her head, and drawn tightly, almost to suffocation. She was then lifted up, and placed in a boat. After half-an-hour's row, she was raised, but nearly senseless, and carried, as well as her terror permitted her to judge, into some mansion, and up several flights of stairs. She was then conducted to a room. Wild with fright, my unfortunate wife looked around her. The persons who carried her off quitted the room before she had power to lift the cloak from her face, and she heard the door bolted and locked. The room was evidently one belonging to a princely mansion, for it was handsomely if not splendidly furnished; but the window, to which she first ran, was firmly secured with cross iron bars.

"Not to weary you, signor, she had been torn from her home by the orders of the Count Alberto Gradinegro, the most profi-

gate and abandoned libertine in Venice. At that period his father was one of the Council of Ten. All Venice rang with stories of that youth's vices and notorious cruelty; for he was known to be as vindictive as he was dissolute. By an unfortunate chance, he had seen my wife purchasing something on the Rialto; for he and his agents were perpetually prowling the city for fresh victims to his accursed seductions. For nearly a month he strove to win my luckless wife. Failing in this, he proceeded to threats; and one evening attempted to approach her, when she snatched his jewelled poniard, and, in her passion, wounded him severely. He retired, vowing, with frightful imprecations, that, having scorned his love, she should try whether his hate was easier to be borne.

“His vile agents soon made their appearance, and, binding and gagging the wretched victim, confined her in one of the damp vaults of the palace. There, that most inhuman monster had the barbarity to leave her during six dreadful months; and there most probably she had died, like many of his victims, but for the protecting hand of Providence. During the inundation, and when at its height, the water burst into most of the lower vaults and cellars of Venice. Fortunately, the palace of Gradinegro was built on a somewhat loftier mound than other parts of the city; but, when at its greatest height, the flood burst through the barriers opposed to it, and rushed furiously into the vaults of the palace. Mariana thought her hour was come; and at first, when she heard the rush of the water, she felt resigned to the will of Heaven, and was content that the miserable remains of life still lingering in her wasted frame should cease. But, signor, we all cling, no matter how wretched, to existence, when the hour of extremity comes. Hope, that blessed soother of our deepest misery, still sheds a ray, and we struggle to preserve that which the moment before we were willing to resign.

“Piling one on another every article the vault contained, she contrived, by the light of her lamp, to reach a projection near the roof, formed by a kind of buttress or square pillar. Still, on came the rush of water, and she heard it burst against the door, under which it forced its way with violence. At length the door gave way with a crash, and a strong torrent burst in. Rapidly, nay instantly, it filled the vault half way up the wall. Higher and higher it rose. The heart of my poor wife beat desperately, as she gazed, with the lamp in her hand, upon the dark discoloured flood, which rose to her feet; and then—oh, what a moment that was even for the stoutest heart—it rested, remained stationary a short time, and then rapidly began to fall. This sudden fall, signor, was caused by

the violent gale from the north that set in after the southerly wind had ceased. I was at Fusini at the time, wind-bound.

"As the waters fell, Mariana suddenly thought how she could descend from her exalted situation; for the temporary structure had been washed away. As the waters eddied round the vault they washed the strong oak door towards her. On this she had the courage to descend, and kept it stationary beside the pillar. In three hours, as near as she could guess, the water had entirely left the vault; and then a hope of escape flashed through her mind. Her prison-door was gone; the flood had, doubtless, burst through every opposition. Unfortunately, her lamp was near its close; her jailer, doubtless, considered her to have perished.

"My wife was right; by following the course of the receding water, and by clambering up and squeezing through the broken foundations of the palace, faint and almost exhausted, she gained the outside of the building. It was then dark; when, just as she was preparing to fly along the narrow causeway that runs along the back of the mansion, two of the domestics of the count came to examine the damage done by the flood. One of them held a torch; and, as she passed, it flashed upon her emaciated features. The man started with an exclamation of horror, dropped the torch, and fled into the house. With infinite difficulty, my wife contrived to reach our abode. Finding the doors fast, and trembling with eagerness to know if I still existed, and inhabited our home, she made her way through the passage. Knowing where I placed everything, she struck a light; and then threw herself exhausted upon the couch.

"Such, signor, was my wife's story. As day broke, the violence of the wind abated; and, seeing the marks, I steered my barque for the tower of Chiozzi. But my wife was evidently overcome by her sufferings; and before we reached Chiozzi she was in a high fever. As soon as the boat touched the beach I procured assistance, and carried Mariana to a fisherman's habitation, who kindly offered us shelter.

"I now gave myself up for lost. Not for a moment did I think of quitting my unhappy wife, who, after eight days of suffering, began to regain her health. I had already planned our departure, and sold my boat, when I was seized, gagged, forced into a gondola, and carried to Venice. Without examination of any sort, I was thrown into a cell into which the light of day never penetrated, nor any other light, save the momentary flash of the jailer's lamp.

"Signor, I will spare you the recital of my sufferings, my insanity; for, in that accursed dungeon I lingered two wretched years without hearing the human voice. If I loathed man-

kind, signor, and panted for revenge upon my species, I am surely to be pitied and excused. At the expiration of that period I was taken from my dungeon and brought before three of the Council. What I looked like, I know not; but, accustomed as the rulers of Venice are to look upon human misery and degradation, they started as their eyes fell upon my gaunt and emaciated frame. One of the councillors, a man advanced in years, whispered something to his next neighbour, and then they looked even more attentively at me.

“‘You are brought here, Luca Manifesto, to receive sentence of death for the crime of murder.’

“I burst into a fierce laugh, as I repeated the word death.

“‘You have inflicted a thousand deaths, since I—’

“‘Gag the prisoner,’ said one of the signors, striking the table forcibly with his hand.

“I was as weak as a child, or I would have braved death then from the hands of the officials, who were about to gag me, when a sign from one of the signors caused my removal and return to my dungeon. About a fortnight after this I was again taken from my cell, and conveyed to the same chamber, wherein, at that time, there was but one signor, attended by a secretary, both masked.

“‘Leave your prisoner,’ said the councillor.

“And I was thus left alone with one of the Rulers of Venice and his secretary.

“The long examination I underwent by this member of the council it is needless, Signor Paoli, to tire you with. Sufficient to say, he clearly proved to me that my sentence for killing the young Gradinegro would be a cruel death. ‘Now hear me, and mark me well, Luca Manifesto,’ said my judge. ‘I offer you life and restoration to your wife and child on certain conditions.’ ‘Name them, signor,’ I eagerly exclaimed, as my heart beat with intolerable anxiety.

“‘At this moment,’ began the councillor, ‘there exists in Venice a secret and mysterious band of spies, agents of Ubertino Carrara. Assassination is almost of nightly occurrence. Up to this moment these spies have baffled all attempts to detect them. I have a project which I shall not now declare; but if you are wise and accept my terms, I intend to employ you as my chief agent. You will be powerfully protected, and well rewarded. But, in the first place, you must become publicly known in Venice as a bravo.’ ‘A bravo!’ I exclaimed, with a start of horror. ‘To be pointed out as an assassin, shunned, loathed, execrated! Signor, I am ready to die. Execute me! It will be but one death; but to be a bravo is to die a thousand times.’ ‘Fool!’ exclaimed my inquisitor,

in a harsh, angry tone, 'Who requires you to be an assassin ? 'Tis but a name you will take to blind others. However, die on the rack if it so please you, and leave your young wife and child to rot in a loathsome dungeon.'

"Oh ! this was agony to my soul. 'Say, signor,' I frantically demanded, 'what am I to do in my character of bravo ? ' 'What you will have to do,' replied the councillor, 'cannot be told you. One thing, however, is certain ; you will not be required to shed the blood of your fellow-creatures ; and, moreover, your bondage shall cease, if it so please you, should you outlive me.' Then, taking the mask from his face, I beheld, with a start, Count Luigi Passarini, then only one of the Council of Forty. 'Now, Luca Manifesto,' continued he, 'I aspire to become one of the ten rulers of Venice ; circumstances have given me the power to save your life and restore you to your family. You shall reside in the house you have always inhabited ; you shall also have numerous spies under your control. The first thing to do will be to render your name notorious, which, with my help and under my directions, you will soon do.' Not to weary you, signor, I took the oath, and a fearful one it was, to obey Count Luigi Passarini in all things save in shedding blood.

"I was restored to my home, my wife, my child ; and then began my career as a ravo. Several influential signors suddenly disappeared. They were, in fact, paid spies of the Carrara. Means were taken to have it secretly bruited through Venice that they died by my dagger, whereas, alas ! they rotted in the dungeons of San Marco. With the power I had, and finding I was in reality at that period serving the State, I actively entered into the plans of the count. All the spies of Carrara were betrayed into the hands of the Government. I had apprehended several minor bravoes, and, strange to say, I actually lived a tolerated bravo in Venice, for almost every one knew me. For four years I acted without my conscience being severely tried. At length, however, Passarini gained his end and became one of the dreaded Council of Ten. From that hour my tormentor, for such the count became, never let me have rest. During eight years I was the slave of that man's ambition and avarice. With such a power as he then wielded, he accomplished every scheme he planned. My soul sickened at the deeds I was forced to commit, not of blood, certainly, but of treachery and deceit.

"I may not repeat all the crimes this man perpetrated. Many a family were crushed that became obnoxious to him. I tried secretly to save some of his victims, and sometimes succeeded. When he commenced his scheme against the families

of Alviano and Tiepolo, I vowed, even if I was discovered, to endeavour to save the Marchese Tiepolo ; and he, by my means, though he knew it not, defied Passarini. I often received large bribes to remove a rival, or to assassinate various individuals. In such cases I gave in the name of the instigator to assassination, and the person to be assassinated, and then both disappeared. The would-be assassin paid fairly enough for his intended crime by imprisonment, while the object of his hate was allowed to fly into other lands. When Passarini placed his confidential associate as the secretary of the Signor Alviano, I was appointed nightly to watch his safe ingress and egress from the palace of the count. One night I caught my nephew Juliano tracking this man. I warned him of his danger in so doing. Nevertheless, the villain Mussato suspected Juliano, and contrived that he should be seized at the very time when the unfortunate Signor Alviano was hurried off to the prisons of St. Mark. With much difficulty I procured his release from Passarini. All the count's plans with respect to the daughter of the Signor Alviano were known to me, and I sent a trusty messenger to Count Steno warning him of the fate intended for the Lady Agnes. It was well known to Passarini that Count Steno was living in the Paduan territories ; and had not the former been cut off by death, he intended getting him into his power. Frightful schemes are also in preparation against the princes of the house of Carrara, who are detested as well as dreaded by the rulers of Venice.

“ Some two or three years after the birth of my little boy here, I prevailed on my poor heart-broken wife, who incessantly wept over my cruel destiny, to quit Venice, and reside in the retired and quiet village of Puelfo, about three miles from Ostia.”

“ Why, that is the very village,” interrupted Paoli, “ where we left our horses.”

“ I know that now, signor ; for so your squire informed me to-day. This will facilitate our plans. A worthy padre who resides there sometimes visits Venice for two or three days together. He knows my story by means of the confessional, and occasionally brings me my little boy, sometimes his sister, and frequently my still tenderly-loved Mariana. I give him all the money I receive to lay out in charity, and now that it has pleased Providence to break my chain, we shall begin the world again. My wife's father is dead, and our formerly happy valleys are now no longer happy valleys, for a race of tyrants rule over the wretched serfs.

“ I have been brief, signor, because I am bound by oath not to speak of certain extraordinary transactions. What I have

related has been sufficient to show you how I was placed. I do not deny that it would have been more manly and more righteous to die by the hand of the executioner than live as I did, the spy of an unsparing Government, and an object of abhorrence and disgust to my fellow-creatures. But, alas! signor, I had not a heart sufficiently stern to relinquish for ever my beloved wife, and to leave her exposed to merciless fate. Therefore, to save her I became the Bravo Caffagiola."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE CAPUCHIN.

PAOLI remained during the day quietly awaiting the return of Caffagiola, who, having finished the history of his early life, had departed, with little Guido, to arrange finally everything for their escape, and to conduct Pulini and Juliano to his residence.

The day passed slowly, the night advanced, and Caffagiola was still absent. Paoli grew uneasy; he feared some mishap; when, just at the moment, the outer portal opened, and then he heard the signal at the door. The Corsican drew back the bolts and the Bravo entered, but alone! Paoli saw at once, by his flushed face and agitated manner, that something wrong had occurred.

"Has anything happened to my squire and Juliano?" asked Paoli, anxiously.

"No, signor, no," replied the Bravo, throwing aside his mantle and mask. "Nothing has happened to them, but I am forced to change my plans. I am watched, signor—watched," he repeated, emphatically; "but be assured I will frustrate our enemies."

"How found you that out, Luca?" demanded our hero.

"From that officer you heard here the other night. I did him good service once, and for once I have met gratitude. My bondage being broken by the death of Passarini, the senators, I hear, mean to insist on my taking fresh oaths, which, if I refuse, they, no doubt, intend rewarding me for the past with a lodging for life beneath the leads of San Marco. I carry in my breast too many secrets. To-morrow night I am to be summoned to take the oaths; but to-morrow night, please the Divine will, we shall be without the Venetian territories. I have been called again to the young count. I do not think he suspects me; but so deadly is his hate to you, signor, that he leaves no stone unturned to entrap you. He has offered me two thousand dollars for your person, but he does not enter

into my plans for your seizure. The officials will not be sent here ; and, worse than all, I cannot gain any insight into his plan of proceeding further than that to-morrow I am to be, at a certain hour, on the bridge of the Rialto.

“After parting from the count I proceeded to alter my plans. There are in Venice several very fast boats, called scampavias. They are manned by Istrians, who carry on a contraband but successful trade with this city. I took Juliano with me to a noted locanda where these men meet. Juliano has succeeded in hiring one of their boats. He knows the captain of her, and says you may trust your life to the faithful performance of the man’s engagements. Besides, he is to have an ample reward. Now, Signor Paoli, you must have full confidence in me.”

“I have, Luca,” returned the Corsican. “Say on.”

“Both our lives, signor, are at stake,” resumed the Bravo ; “for I would sooner die a thousand deaths than renew my oath. I can count on help in this need, but I may not either betray names or the means to be employed. I will now give you instructions how you are to perform your part. I know it is not easy to startle you, signor ; nevertheless, you must leave this mansion to-morrow, disguised in my garments and mask !”

Paoli looked somewhat astounded.

“I am a tall man, signor,” resumed Luca, “but you are taller, though the difference would not be perceived when we are not together. Now, the costume you will wear is well known to all the spies and officers of the Government. Should any one, addressing you, hold his hand thus”—here the Bravo performed the signal—“you then make this private signal”—showing Paoli another—“and pass on without speaking. After you have made that signal, no officer or spy of St. Mark will venture to address or question you. Mix with the procession in the square ; and when you reach the quay where they embark, leave them and proceed to the other side or east mole, where the fishing craft are moored. Lift your arm above your head—thus, and immediately one of the gondoliers will return your signal. You may then enter his boat, and leave the rest to him—he knows what to do. Now, signor, do you perfectly understand the part you have to perform ?”

“Perfectly,” returned Paoli, rehearsing the signals to the satisfaction of the Bravo. “I have no fear of failure if, as you say, no question will be put to me.”

“No fear of that,” returned the Bravo. “When I make that signal to an officer of St. Mark, it denotes that I am on a special and secret service. In fact, you can have no idea of

the intricate system of espionage adopted by the rulers of St. Mark. You must not open your lips to the gondolier into whose boat you enter, for he is one of the gondoliers of St. Mark disguised ; but he is quite ignorant of my intentions, and simply obeys directions already given to him."

Most part of that night was passed by Paoli in conversation with the Bravo. The next day, having slept a few hours, our hero was attired in the dress of the Bravo—a costume immortalized by Titian. His hat and plume and mask were in the genuine bravo style, and he carried his good sword beneath the long sable mantle which enveloped his figure.

Leaving the mansion, he found himself in the open air.

"Follow that causeway to the end," said Caffagiola ; "you will then find yourself on the borders of a canal, whence you can perceive in the distance the bridge of the Rialto. In one hour more we meet, please God, again ! "

And diving beneath the low arch, Paoli was left alone.

With all his hardihood and daring, the knight could but feel somewhat agitated as he advanced into the city. At first only a solitary person or so of obscure rank passed, and paid no attention whatever to him ; but, as he gained the borders of the canal, he fell in with numbers hurrying to the Square of St. Mark. The canals were covered with gondolas, and, so anxious did every one seem to reach the scene of the festivities that he passed along unheeded. Gaining confidence, he proceeded leisurely to the bridge of the Rialto. As yet he had not passed a single officer of the Republic ; at least, so he thought ; but, as he afterwards found out, they were all disguised as citizens, for, just as he reached the foot of the bridge, a man in a plain brown cloak and hat, unmasked, passed across him, and, placing his hand upon his left shoulder, looked him full in the face. At first, not expecting an officer of St. Mark in the attire of the person who thus passed him, Paoli was moving forward, but, instantly recollecting himself, he placed his left hand on his right shoulder and walked on. Before he had measured a hundred yards our hero had to repeat the signal twice. The last time he did so the official, instead of passing or remaining stationary, to his surprise followed close after him. Not liking this, Paoli turned into a narrow causeway out of the crowd, in order to see if the man still followed him, and, to his vexation, found that he did. As he approached Paoli instantly placed his hand upon the hilt of his sword. The man was masked, and wrapped from head to foot in a black mantle.

Paoli paused. The stranger came close to the Corsican, and, in a low voice, said,—

“Follow me !”

Rather surprised, if not alarmed, Paoli repeated the signal. The stranger, in an impatient manner, uttered a smothered oath, and, raising his mask for an instant, looked the knight in the face, saying,—

“Now follow me !”

Paoli was thunderstruck. He recognized the face at once. He had often seen the stranger in the society he had mingled in when residing at the Tiepolo Palace, and he knew that the individual who confronted him was the son of Count Passarini ! Before he had time to recover from his astonishment, a Capuchin friar, bulky and unwieldy in person, with his hood drawn completely over his features, and carrying a well-filled wallet on his shoulders, stepped up between Paoli and the young count. The friar whispered something in the ear of the count, who immediately caught him by the arm. Paoli, instantly recovering himself, passed on, leaving the two conversing.

He soon regained the crowded thoroughfare, and found himself mixed up with the giddy multitude that filled the great Square of St. Mark to overflowing. The procession was moving on, and Paoli, after answering two more signals, followed it to the place of embarkation, astonished beyond measure at his rencontre with the son of Passarini, and amazed at the interposition of the Capuchin friar, who had thus, in the very nick of time, saved him from discovery. Our hero paid little attention to the mummary going on before him.

At length he got to the quay ; and, crossing over to the deserted eastern side, he perceived the skiffs, and four gondolas, just as Caffagiola had described. Advancing to the brink of the quay, he made the desired signal, which was immediately returned by one of the gondoliers reclining on the platform of his boat. Paoli was turning to descend, when his gaze became fixed upon four persons, who, at that moment, also advanced to the steps leading down to the gondolas. The two first were the young Count Passarini, the huge Capuchin, and two strangers in long mantles and masked, with the badge of St. Mark on their right arm.

“Are we betrayed or discovered ?” thought the knight. For a moment he remained rooted to the spot ; but, recollecting that to hesitate in following the instructions of Caffagiola was ruin, he resolved, let what would happen, to follow them to the letter. Calmly descending the steps, he entered the gondola, when, to his no little surprise, the Capuchin, the count, and the two masked officers also came on board, without uttering a word ; but Paoli perceived the dark eyes of the count through the mask fixed upon him.

"Then the game is up," muttered the knight to himself, with bitterness, and clasping the hilt of his sword with a firm grasp. "Yet it will cost a life or two before I become an inmate of their accursed dungeons. Better die."

A strange silence was observed by all. The gondolier seemed no way surprised at his increased freight; but, taking to his oar, impelled the light boat from the quay. Paoli, the count, and the unwieldy Capuchin, sat within the awning; the two officers without.

They had proceeded something more than two hundred yards into the lagune, when the count rising, said aloud (placing his hand within his vest, and grasping something at the same time),—

"Now then!"

Paoli sprang to his feet; but the words had hardly left the lips of the count than his throat was clasped in a grasp of iron by the Capuchin, and the same instant the gondolier was dragged, almost choking, within the awning of the boat by one of the officers, whose mask fell from his face, and Paoli, in a voice of joy and amazement, exclaimed,—

"Pulini!"

"Gag them, gag them quick!" muttered the Capuchin, throwing back his cowl, and tossing a gag to Pulini. Caffagiola, for it was he himself, manged the instrument like an old hand; so, in an instant, the count lay gagged and bound on the bottom of the gondola.

The boat, in the meantime, proceeded rapidly into the lagune, impelled by the vigorous strokes of the other officials. Paoli was so completely amazed that all he could do was to press the hand of the delighted Pulini, who, with Caffagiola's assistance, soon had the gondolier by the side of the ill-starred count.

"This time, Signor Paoli," exclaimed Caffagiola, "fortune, when reduced to the last extremity, favoured us."

While speaking, the *ci-devant* bravo commenced unloading his person of sundry articles; and, casting off his entire load and disguise, appeared in the simple costume of a citizen. At that moment the gondola was brought to a stand-still; and, to the fresh surprise of the Corsican, the cheerful open countenance of Juliano, the gondolier who had hitherto impelled the boat, entered the awning.

Paoli shook the poor fellow's hand with sincere pleasure, saying,—

"What a fortunate fellow I am to possess three such trusty and faithful friends!"

"By the blessed saints, signor, I thought it all up with us

a short time back. But, uncle," turning to Caffagiola, "here is the scampavia coming up with a fine breeze. What shall we do with those two ?" pointing to the struggling forms of the Count Passarini and his accomplice.

" You may ungag him now, boy," said Caffagiola. " We are beyond danger from his shouts, were he ever so strong in the lungs. Besides, I wish to bid him farewell, and send back my curse," he added bitterly, " to them who blackened my name, and kept me in cruel bondage and infamy for fifteen long years."

As Caffagiola spoke he stooped, took the poniard from the vest of the count, cast off the bonds, and displaced the gag from his mouth. Slowly the count rose, casting aside his mantle, while his chest heaved with renewed rage and pain of breathing from the effect of the gag. For several moments he stood facing Paoli, unable to utter a word, but with eyes darting defiance. Without paying the slightest heed to Caffagiola, who remained with his arms folded watching him, he addressed the knight, in a calm steady voice, saying,—

" Signor Paoli, you have escaped my vengeance. Fortune has favoured you. Had she favoured me, in four and twenty hours from this you would have died under the torture. I had a right to seek vengeance on the murderer of my father. (Paoli's face flushed). Nay," resumed the count, " hear me yet a moment. You are a knight, and bear a character for daring deeds. I demand from you now, not satisfaction for the usage I have received, for in that I do not blame you ; but I demand a meeting, whcre you please, either to fall by your hand, or avenge my unfortunate father."

" Signor Count," replied Paoli, struck by the tone and manner of the Venetian, who was a noble-looking youth, and accounted in Venice a most skilful swordsman, but of a licentious and reckless disposition, " Signor Count, allow me first to set you right. You have styled me a murderer. The accusation is false ; no weapon of mine, or weapon of any sort, terminated your father's life. The death he met was richly merited. An innocent family plunged into misery, and accused of crimes the invention of his own brain—"

" Sir Corsican," fiercely interrupted the count, " I want no history of the past. If you slew not my parent with your own hands you—you—and no other, caused his death. I again demand from you, as a man, satisfaction at the sword's point. Let the meeting be without the territory of Venice."

" Be it so, Sir Count," responded Paoli.

At that moment the gondola struck against the side of some object, and Caffagiola said,—

"Signor Paoli, there is no time to lose now. Here is the vessel that will, in a few hours, bear us beyond the territories of this accursed Republic. Count Passarini," continued the Bravo, turning to the young noble, "you must accompany us yet a few hours. You can then land in this gondola. As to your mad notion of revenging your father, who himself was a double murderer—Ah! you may start and frown, and clench your hand: I say it, that knew it well, though I absolve you from any participation in his crimes—you might as well fence with the moon as seek satisfaction with your sword from that noble signor. He will not slay you, that I know; for though you meant him evil, you have done him no injury, thanks to Dame Fortune for once."

"Dog! worm!" exclaimed the count, passionately, and grinding his teeth. "I bandy not words with such as thou."

"You are right, count," retorted Caffagiola, with a bitter smile. "Caffagiola the Bravo is too honest a name to be mixed up with the polluted one of Passarini."

Paoli, who, to a certain degree, pitied the young count, now followed Caffagiola and the rest into a fast-sailing scampavia, manned by six Istrian sailors; and, bending her low gunnel beneath the rippling waves, under the pressure of two enormous latine sails, the gondola was taken in tow, the shicets were slacked, and the fast boat flew over the surface of the lagune like a dolphin. Paoli paced the deck conversing with the overjoyed Pulini; while the count, leaning against the mast, gazed abstractedly on the rapidly diminishing towers and spires of lordly Venice.

The Lido was passed; and the barque bounded over the sparkling waters of the Adriatic. Then, by the directions of Caffagiola, she shot up in the wind and drew her foresail aback.

"Now, Sir Count," said Caffagiola, "you may, with the gondolier, gain the shore. The water is smooth and the distance short."

The count approached Paoli, saying—

"Name your time and place. If it were a thousand miles from the Venetian territory, I will forfeit life or meet you."

"Sir Count, you shall have your wish; and the sooner this affair is finished the better. My time, at this moment, is of deep importance to me. Name any town twenty miles without the territory of the Venetian States, and let it be three days from this. You may be attended by any friend you please."

The count appeared to think for a moment, and then said—

"I shall be in Rovigo three days hence, and will expect you."

Without another word, he descended the side of the boat, and wrapping himself in his mantle, the gondolier threw himself on the seat, and, in a few moments, the light boat was rowing rapidly towards the Lido.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FLIGHT.

AFTER the departure of the Count Passarini, the scampavia was put before the breeze ; and rapidly the barrier of the Lido faded from their view.

From Caffagiola, Paoli requested an explanation of the late events, which had so nearly threatened to defeat their projects of escape.

“Knowing, signor,” began Caffagiola, “what a trifle might overset my plans, I prepared myself accordingly. I disguised Juliano and Pulini as officials of the lowest grade—men employed in prowling the city from morning to night, to watch any popular feeling among the lower orders. I myself determined to follow your footsteps closely, disguised as a burly Capuchin, desiring Juliano and Pulini to keep me continually in sight. When the young count, who, both as a member of the Council of Forty and chief officer, knows all our signals, stopped you, I was not a little agitated, for I was close to you. You may imagine that *you*, instead of me, might have been disguised as a Capuchin, and have incurred less risk. But not so ; four times was I stopped and examined by spies of the count, who were stupefied, on my lifting my cowl, to behold a second Caffagiola, for they had seen you disguised in my clothes. Nevertheless, I mystified them completely. But, as I was saying, when the count made you the signal, I was startled, for I knew him at once, and felt satisfied he would address you. He did so ; my determination was then made.

“Catching him by the arm, I whispered—‘I am Caffagiola.’ With a start of amazement, he at once eagerly said, ‘What means this ? Who, then, is yonder man in your garments ?’ I instantly replied, and with perfect calmness, ‘Your victim and my prize, the Corsican, Paoli.’ ‘Holy Paul, then,’ said the count, ‘yonder are two officers ; forward, and seize him.’ ‘Softly, count. You know not that man’s powers. I have him safe. Those two officers are obeying my commands. We are following him. He will enter a gondola at the east pier ; and he thinks the gondolier is in his interest. I have changed him. We will enter the same boat with him, and shall then be five to one ; and I am no child at a struggle. On the water he cannot escape us ; but here, in this crowd, and with his strong

arm, he might.' 'By Heavens! you have acted well and wisely, Caffagiola. Follow him. Once bound and gagged, the thousand ducats are yours.' 'I have the materials here,' I said, in a half laugh, showing him the iron gags and wristbands which I intended for him. 'But how,' asked the count, with a sudden start, as we slowly followed you, 'how got he your garments, and, above all, the secret signals?' 'By bribing,' I replied; 'an official of the lowest grade is his instructor. I have him in custody.' 'Good,' bitterly replied the count; 'before the next sun sets he shall die a death of torture. But how got he your garments?' he again demanded. 'They are not mine,' I answered; 'only made as near as possible to match. This project of escape, I find, has been the invention of my ill-starred nephew, Juliano.' 'Ha! is it so?—then he—' 'Nay, Signor Count,' I interposed, as if anxiously. 'You must be satisfied with letting the poor youth escape from Venice. He is only faithful to a kind master. You cannot blame him. You must promise me that, or I stir no further.' I do believe this pretended interest in Juliano blinded the count more than anything else. 'Be it so,' responded he; and just then you made the signal to the boatman. 'Now heed me well, Caffagiola,' said the count; 'this man is powerful and determined. There is no use in risking life. We must take him suddenly. When I say, *Now then*, do you throw yourself suddenly upon him, and we four will assist.' As we entered the gondola, I whispered your squire, 'The moment you hear the words, *Now then*, seize the gondolier, and prevent him from shouting.'

"Thus, signor, we completely mastered our enemy when I feared the most. But, signor, if you give the count the meeting he is mad enough to demand, we must be wary; for I suspect he will yet try some treachery against you."

"I have no fear of that whatever," said our hero. "I have always heard the young count spoken of as of a very high spirit, and the most expert cavaliero in Venice with the small sword."

In less than four hours the scampavia cast anchor off Puelfo, the village where Paoli had left his horses.

"We must not loiter even here, signor," said Caffagiola, as they prepared to land. "A fast galley would reach this in an hour or two after us. You had better, therefore, ride on to Rovigo. I will take up my wife and children, and sail in an hour for Ravenna, as we settled last night. There I shall wait your arrival. But I again say, be cautious with this count. I have no faith in any Venetian where vengeance is lurking in his heart."

"Have no fear, Luca. I stand on *terra firma* now, beyond the

reach of the long arm of San Marco. With my good steed and my trusty sword, and my backful squire, I feel equal to a host. Juliano goes with you. So farewell for five or six days; after that, when we meet, we will arrange our future proceedings."

The fact is that, during the hours of the night passed in the Bravo's mansion, Paoli had defeated every argument which Caffagiola had used to prove that no other course was now left him than to get to some distant part of Italy, and begin the world again. The fear that some one might hereafter recognize him as Caffagiola the Bravo, haunted and tormented his mind. Paoli showed him that to no other part of the world could he go with greater safety to avoid that imaginary risk, than to Corsica. There, our hero insisted on bestowing upon him a small fief on his own estate. This would support him comfortably, in addition to his own exertions. With respect to little Guido, Paoli resolved to rear and educate him, and take charge of his future fortunes.

As to Juliano, he was the merriest and happiest of the whole party. No sooner out of sight of the towers and palaces of Venice, than a vast load seemed to be taken from his breast.

Having settled with the host of the venta, where he had left his horses, and rewarded Pietro for the good care he had taken of them, our hero delayed no longer, but proceeded at once to Rovigo, where he remained three days; but, as no tidings of the count reached him, he left the town, caring very little about the matter. On reaching the place appointed as their rendezvous, he found Juliano anxiously awaiting his arrival.

"All safe and well?" demanded Paoli.

"All, signor, and extremely anxious for your arrival. Indeed, my uncle was so uneasy that he felt inclined to start for Rovigo. I myself, signor, never imagined for a moment that the young count would keep his appointment."

"You were quite right, Juliano," returned the count. "I had much the same opinion. Now, show the way to the best locanda. To-morrow you must mount and travel as quickly as possible to Castle Baldo, with letters to Count Steno and the Signor Alviano, as I do not wish to take them by surprise. In the meantime I shall be able to make arrangements, and procure a vessel to carry your uncle and family to Corsica. But first of all I must procure funds, and write to Pisa for a supply. Perhaps, however, I may find some merchant here connected with the Pisan bank. If so, our movements will be much expedited. And now let us to the albergo."

CHAPTER XL.

OLD FRIENDS.

INTO a noble saloon of the Castle Baldo we must now beg our readers to accompany us. It was summer; the windows of the saloon were open, and looked out upon a long range of terrace. From this terrace a magnificent prospect was obtained over that beautiful but somewhat stormy lake which now bears the name of Garda.

Though the residence of Count Steno was called a castle, it did not in the least resemble an edifice of that nature. It certainly was erected where Castle Baldo once stood; but the count, Venetian-like, had remorselessly removed all traces of the old ruins except one solitary tower—which was preserved as an armoury—and built a mansion according to the Venetian taste of that period. Beneath the terrace ran a noble park, leading to the borders of the lake; and at the back of the mansion, ascending a gently rising ground, were extensive and tastefully-arranged gardens.

Walking along one of the many serpentine paths through the shady park was a graceful cavalier, richly attired, even for that time and place. His plumed hat he carried in his hand, and as he bent his head, covered with bright chestnut ringlets, he appeared to be earnestly pleading some urgent matter to a stately and lovely girl by his side. The cavalier was Ugolino Carrara, nephew to the reigning lord of Padua, and the maiden, Paulina Tiepolo, who had consented, after some struggle of heart, and to please a beloved father, to be betrothed to the young and amiable signor now walking with her.

To return to the saloon. Seated near a table sat the Signor Alviano, no longer emaciated and careworn, but hale and well for his years. He was busy writing letters to various correspondents in Italy. His courier had returned from Capraja some time, and had brought the melancholy tidings that his beloved brother was no more. The inheritance of the crusader, therefore, remained for the last Damari to arrive and take possession. The podesta of Capraja, a kind and worthy man, held everything sacred for the heir, should he ever return. The courier had also brought intelligence that chased the white rose from the cheek of Agnes, and allowed the red proudly to show its triumph upon the cheek of the maiden; for the courier had heard in Capraja that Corsica had almost recovered her freedom, Bastia alone remaining in the power of Genoa: and

that the leader of the Corsicans was Giacinto Paoli. To describe the delight of father and daughter would be impossible. Everything was rapidly arranged for their departure for Capraja, whence a messenger could be despatched to Corsica.

How Paoli had got to Corsica, it was utterly impossible for father or daughter to conjecture ; nor whether he had been first to Venice to look after them (for Agnes well knew the daring spirit of her lover would brave the risk of entering the city), or whether he had first landed on the shores of his native land to free it from her detested enemies. All was conjecture. Satisfied, however, that her lover was at length heard of, the faded beauties of Agnes Alviano returned.

Agnes was seated opposite her father in the saloon of Castle Baldo, writing also to her loved friend, the Signora Tolmeo, who was then in Pisa. The letter was an earnest request that she would join them in Lucca, and accompany them to Capraja. When Agnes and her father were seized by orders of Passarini, the Signora Tolmeo was left perfectly at liberty to go whither she pleased. Distracted at the fate of Agnes—an unknown fate to her—she remained several weeks dangerously ill at the palace of the Marchese Tiepolo. At length, sad and dispirited, she proceeded on a visit to her relations in Pisa, despairing ever to hear more of Agnes, whom she loved with all the fondness of a mother.

Not to detain our readers in this part of our narrative, we will briefly say that the Signor Alviano and his daughter, after an affectionate farewell from the generous Count and Countess Steno, and a most tearful adieu from the betrothed Paulina, departed on their journey. On reaching Lucca, they found the Signora Tolmeo anxiously awaiting their arrival. After a week's rest—for the journey in those times from Garda to Lucca was not performed as now—they sailed in a light barque for Capraja, where they were received with enthusiasm by the simple but attached natives, who had always been famous for their devotion to their seigneurs. Here, the first thing they learned was that Corsica was entirely freed from her yoke, and that General Paoli, supposed dead, was alive, and actually at that moment governor or podesta (the latter being the title used in Corsica at that period). Letters were sent by Alviano, now Marchese Damari, to General Paoli, for his son. The return of the messenger brought kind and congratulatory letters from the general, stating that his son, the moment the liberty of his country was achieved, had sailed for Pisa to proceed to Venice in search of them.

Again the cheek of Agnes blanched.

"Surely," she exclaimed, "he will incur some risk in venturing into Venice. How unfortunate!"

"Nay, my child," replied the Marchese, "Providence has been most bountiful. Murmur not at this slight check to our present most fortunate lot. When we recollect that some few months back I was a banished, proscribed man, living in a fearful dungeon, my beloved child torn from my embrace——"

"Dearest father," interrupted Agnes, throwing herself into his arms, "forgive your erring daughter. We have, in truth, been highly favoured. I will murmur no more, but wait with patience and resignation for the time when it may please Providence to restore to us him whom we despaired of ever again seeing."

Some six months after the departure of Agnes from Castle Baldo, Paulina Tiepolo became the wife of Ugolino Carrara, and shortly after accompanied her husband to Padua. The Marchese and Marchesa Tiepolo were on a visit, with their son-in-law, when one morning Count Steno entered the saloon with an open letter in his hand. He seemed considerably elated, and immediately exclaimed to the Marchese—

"Here's news! Passarini is dead—found drowned, like a blind puppy, in the lagune."

"Drowned!" echoed the Marchese, starting up, and looking with astonishment at his son-in-law.

"Even so," responded Steno; "and that is not the whole of it. That glorious fellow Paoli, who daringly entered Venice to look after the fate of his betrothed, waylaid Passarini on the lagune, and the villain trying to stab him fell overboard and was drowned. It was discovered that Paoli was the cause of his fate. Endeavours of the most crafty and treacherous kind were made to apprehend him; but, by the subtle assistance of Caffagiola the Bravo, Paoli escaped from Venice, despite all the power of the mighty Council. Oh, how the beards of the mysterious Ten will wag at being thus baffled!"

"But where, in the name of wonder, Michaello," exclaimed the Marchesa, "did you gather all this strange intelligence?"

"From this letter," replied the count, "brought by our once merry gondolier, Juliano. It is written by Paoli, whom he left at Egino. The knight himself will be here in a few days. He first was to stop a day or so at Pisa, but, poor fellow, he will meet a disappointment, for he fully expects to find Agnes and her father here."

"How rejoiced I shall be to see him," exclaimed the Marchese Tiepolo. "I love him as a son."

Though our hero felt the disappointment severely on arriving at Castle Baldo, and finding that his betrothed and her father

had departed for Capraja, yet he experienced a feeling of intense pleasure in embracing those dear and kind friends to whom he owed so much. He heard, with profound astonishment, of the transformation of the merchant Alviano into the Marchese Damari, and that, after all, the Marchese was of Corsican extraction, and united by marriage with the Paoli family, his father having wedded one of the heiresses of Ficaoli—a Paoli.

Though Paoli was surprised, Pulini, his squire, was not. He had recognised the merchant the very moment he beheld him enter the cabin of Paoli's galley in Byzantium. When a youth of sixteen or seventeen years of age, Pulini remembered the old Marchese Damari and his two sons visiting our hero's grandfather at their mansion at Ficaoli. The young Damari was then about three-and-twenty. Pulini, the foster-brother of Giacinto's father, often accompanied the youths to the chase, as a guide over the wild glens and mountains of Corsica. Pulini never forgot his features. As Paoli quitted the cabin to receive Pisani, the merchant spoke to the squire, and briefly stated to him his reason for remaining unknown, requesting the worthy squire to keep his secret, which he faithfully did.

After spending eight days with his devoted friends, the knight bade them farewell. They met with delight, and parted with regret, but with the intention of meeting again. Juliano did not leave without substantial proofs of the Marchese Tiepolo's generosity.

Paoli now set out for Pisa, where he chartered a light barque to carry him and his followers to Capraja. He found Luca Manifesto and his family so much improved in appearance as scarcely to be recognised. Mariano Manifesto was still a very beautiful woman, and her husband, now that his mind was relieved, a remarkably fine, soldier-like looking man, in the prime of life. But misery and torture of mind at the bondage he was enduring, with a total neglect of person, rendered it scarcely possible for any one to imagine they beheld the individual who had acted the horrid part of the Venetian spy and bravo.

Giacinto Paoli felt much pleased with the manners and appearance of his *protégés*, and particularly so with their daughter, an interesting girl, about sixteen years old.

The whole party embarked towards evening. The breeze being favourable, they gained the mouth of the Arno, and passed the shallows that even then rendered its navigation intricate. During the night, however, the wind died completely away, and a thick grey mist crept over the waters,

enveloping them in its embrace. But when the sun rose, a light air from the land wafted them onward, and Paoli, impatient and restless, ascended to the after-deck, or poop, as it was then styled, for all the small and many of the larger craft of that period were open in the waist, and only the poop and forecastle were decked.

Pulini was already there, leaning over the side, and looking towards the quarter where he expected soon to see his native land.

“This mist will speedily clear, signor,” said he, as his master came to his side. “We cannot be more than a league or so from Capraja.”

The squire was right. As the sun rose, so also did the vapour, which curled and wreathed; and then, as the light air increased and filled the lofty latine sails, the mist was swept from the face of the deep, and the bright unclouded sun shone out over the sparkling waters. Within three miles of them lay the home of the Damaris, and Paoli felt his heart beat quicker as his gaze rested on its singularly rugged outline. Beyond it, to the westward, distant only twenty miles, rose the lofty mountains of Corsica—the summit of Monte Rotundi, covered with perpetual snow, rising up clear and distinct in the pure bright blue of the sky. Off the island of Capraja were several fishing-craft lying at anchor.

They rapidly neared Capraja, and soon its strong and imposing fortress became visible as they opened a bluff head of the island. On the keep of the castle was a lofty standard—and as the voyagers approached the mouth of the rude outer haven, an immense flag was hoisted on the standard. It blew out with the then stiff breeze, and Paoli, whose eyes were fixed upon its fluttering folds, suddenly caught the arm of his squire with a grasp as if of iron.

“By Heavens!” exclaimed the knight, “that is the banner of Genoa—there is no mistaking it. Can it be possible that this island is in possession of our cursed foes?”

“It will never do,” suddenly exclaimed Pulini, “to run thus into the enemy’s jaws. Put down your helm, man, and tack. Look, signor, there is a ponderous chain across the inner harbour over to the tower under the fortress.

For several moments Paoli remained electrified at this new obstacle raised up against him. Could the Genoese have again invaded Corsica? was his first thought. The Tartana now sailed slowly out from the bay. Luca Manifesto and Juliano, not exactly understanding the cause, and quite ignorant that the banner which blew out so ostentatiously from the standard on the ramparts was a hostile one.

Turning to the equally surprised padrone of the Tartana, who was then at the helm, Paoli, in a few words, let him into the secret of his change of purpose, requesting him to put his craft alongside one of the fishing-boats they passed in coming in.

This was soon done, and the fishing-boat being hailed came alongside. A stout, hardy-looking Caprese stood up and civilly inquired if they wanted fish, as they had some fine red mullet, for which fish the sea around Capraja and Corsica had been famous so far back as the time of the Cæsars.

“We will willingly take your fish, friend, and pay you well for them, if you will afford us a little information. Your island, I see, is in possession of Genoa ; at least, the flag of the republic is hoisted over the fortress.”

“Yes, curse them and their flag !” replied the Caprese. “The island is in possession of a band of devils ; for not contented with using sorcery and magic” (and the man crossed himself devoutly), “they have plundered us of everything, and ill-treated our wives and daughters. They even rob us poor fishermen (when we return in the evening) of a third of our labours—*maladette bestias* that they are !”

“Make your minds easy, friends,” said Paoli, rather startled at the man’s account. “You shall have help soon, and from a quarter you have a right to expect help from, that is, Corsica.”

The man looked eagerly into the face of Paoli ; for he had spoken the last sentence in the Corsican dialect, well known in Capraja.

“Tell me, *amico*,” resumed our hero, “how long have these adventurers, for such I suppose they are, held the island ? And what do you mean by sorcery and magic ?”

“They have gained the island, signor,” said the man, speaking with marked respect, “by sorcery. How else did they contrive to get ashore ?—for neither ship nor boat was next morning in the harbour, nor was the chain either broken or let go. So how, except by magic, could three hundred men, in heavy armour, scale our cliffs ?”

“Ha ! by Heavens, I understand it now,” ejaculated our hero, with a start.

He said no more. The Caprese looked surprised ; but added—

“This happened near two months ago, signor.”

“And the Marchese Damari and his daughter ?” demanded Paoli, with intense anxiety. “What was their fate after the subjugation of the island ?”

“You seem to know our island and its chief,” said the

Caprese, thoughtfully, while his comrade, an old but vigorous man, sat with his hands leaning on the gunnel, and looking with a puzzled and thoughtful glance into the anxious features of Paoli.

"True, my good fellow," said he, "I do know your lord and your island well. I am a native of Corsica, and you know that Capraja and Corsica were ever joined against our common foe, the Genoese."

"I thought so," muttered the old man to himself. "God bless you, for I know you; but I will keep my knowledge to myself for certain reasons. Please you, signor," continued he, aloud, rising and doffing his crimson cap, "I will tell you all you want to know better than my boy there, for I happened to be up that night, and saw those men take the fortress with my own eyes."

"Come aboard, then," said Paoli; "we will take your boat in tow."

The fisherman came aboard, and Paoli took him into the after-cabin, leaving the young man surrounded with auditors on the poop above. Our hero made the fisherman drink a goblet of wine, and then begged him to relate full particulars of all that had happened since the taking of the island.

"I beg your pardon, signor, for not obeying you at once, but I know you are a Paoli: God bless the name! It has ever been the watchword of liberty; and the moment I recognised you I said to myself—'Old Antonio will live long enough yet to see that cursed flag, that waves so bravely now, trampled under our feet.'"

Paoli was not much surprised at the old man's recognising him, for the fishermen from Capraja frequented almost daily the harbours and bays of Corsica.

"Knowing who I am, then, my good friend, speak without reserve; for, with the Divine help, before one month expires, I will free your island from these lawless ruffians."

"Alas! signor," said the old man, "even to you it will be more difficult than you imagine, unless—" and the old man crossed himself—"you get into the island the same way those devils did."

"Now let me hear," interrupted the knight, somewhat impatiently, "how all this took place."

"Well, signor, you shall hear. It was a rough, stormy night, and, having indifferently secured my boat, I got up to go down to the harbour. My cot is about a quarter of a mile outside the village; for I own a little vineyard, and I built a cot in it, which was unusual with us, for we all live within the boundary wall surrounding the village. Well, I was groping my way, for it was dreadful dark, when I thought I heard a

singular and hollow sound behind me. I stopped, and again quite close to me I heard the tramp of many feet. I crossed myself, signor, for I was frightened, and crouched down behind a rock, listened, and looked in the direction of the sound. I had hardly done so when a number of men, near a hundred, I am sure, in armour, passed quickly and silently before my sight. I could not utter a prayer, signor, for my life. Water dripped from my face, and I shook like as in an ague fit. Before I could bring myself to move from the spot to return to my hut—for, in truth, Signor Paoli, I thought it was a band of fiends that had passed me—a loud and fierce shout rent the air ; and then followed screams and cries of all kinds. I now ran towards the village, and, as I gained the wall, I saw, by the flame of wood brands, hastily lighted, a body of those men facing the gates of the fortress. My fear, in part, was now gone, for I saw they must be men, because the garrison—a very small one, as no enemy is ever expected by the land-gate—were surprised ; and though they fought stoutly, and we all, now being completely roused, ran for our arms to assist, the gates were in a moment forced, most of its defenders slain, and several of the townspeople wounded. No sooner had the enemy gained the gates than they raised the bridge, let fall the portcullis, and the fortress was gained. Vain was every attempt of ours, the three succeeding days, to regain possession of it. The fourth day a galley with two hundred well-armed men made the harbour. Those in the fortress have the command of the chain, the powerful windlass to raise it being in the lower tower. The chain was let go ; the galley entered and landed her men under the walls of the fortress. Against their united force (nearly four hundred men in heavy and complete mail) we could do but little. The strongest and most determined amongst us made a noble defence to save our new lord and his lovely daughter ; for, although so short a time amongst us, she has already made herself beloved. Alas ! the castle was taken, plundered, and the Marchese and his daughter carried prisoners to the fortress, where they now remain ; and God only knows what these devils of Genoese intend doing."

Paoli had listened patiently to the old man's prolix recital. His thoughts were busy during the time ; but he did not interrupt the speaker.

"Did you hear the name, or did you see the leaders of these invaders ?" demanded Paoli.

"Oh yes, signor. We see them now often enough ; they have disarmed all the inhabitants, and taken the arms into the fortress. They have even made laws, sanctioned by Genoa, to

whom they have sold the island, or will sell it. Twenty dollars, as a penalty, is imposed on every native found with any kind of weapon on his person or in his house. This is for the first offence ; but the second time he is convicted of having a weapon, they threaten to hang the offender. A certain quantity of provisions are to be provided daily ; and a third of our fish is taken from us. In fact, signor, if this lasts three months longer, our podesta that was says we must starve."

"But you have not told me the name of their leader," said our hero.

"They call him Signor Andrea Campaldino."

Paoli started, repeating—

"Campaldino ! By the Pope, this is astounding. Describe him."

"He is a well-made man enough, signor ; and one side of his face is neither wicked nor bad in its expression ; but the other, from a deep scar and the loss of an eye, is disagreeable to look upon."

"By all that's wonderful," ejaculated the astonished Paoli, "the same man ! And now, friend, we will part. Here are a few dollars. Kcep your own counsel. Say not a word of what has passed this day. Mention not my name even to your son."

"Beg your pardon, signor ; but better take my boy with you. He would risk fifty lives to serve you ; and I suspect he remembers you too, for he wasin Bastia when you sailed last from that port. He was dying to see you, and, poor boy, he would give you his life. But, though I am his father, I must confess it, before this time to-morrow every soul in the island would hear of his having seen and talked to you, and that you were coming to deliver the island from her enemies. That's his weak point, signor."

"Then, in sooth, I must take him with me," said Paoli. "But why not come yourself ? You will be of use to me. Have you any objection ?"

"Oh, none whatever, signor. I wished to offer myself, but was afraid to say so."

"But what will they say when you are missed, *amico* ?"

"Oh, that is nothing, signor. We often go for days and weeks together and fish off Elba, and there dispose of our fish to great advantage."

Paoli immediately ascended upon deck, desired the padrone to make fast the fishing-boat to a strong hauser, and shape his course with all sail for Bastia. Then, calling Pulini, he returned to the cabin of the Tartana, where we must leave him to see after our unfortunate heroine and her father.

CHAPTER XLI.

WHEN Andrea Campaldino gained possession of the fortress and island of Capraja, he was by no means aware that, in the Marchese Damari and his daughter, he would behold the Venetian merchant Alviano and his child. The only person who could have enlightened him on that point was his Italian associate Montoni, and he, singularly enough, was the only man of the party slain in the attack of the fortress, though many, notwithstanding their armour, were severely wounded. In the assault on the Damari mansion he lost several men, for the natives had time to arm, and were not taken by surprise. When his comrade, Achilles Furiani, arrived from Genoa with reinforcements, he immediately took measures to prevent any sudden rising of the exasperated natives, and completely deprived them of every weapon. He also sent over a hundred of the ablest-bodied young men to Genoa to serve as seamen, and in return he received from the government the appointment of governor of the island. After having disarmed the natives, and sent away their best men, Campaldino saw at once that it would be utterly impossible to maintain and keep in order the host of greedy adventurers he had tempted to join him in the expedition. Having carried the Marchese and his daughter captives to the fortress, he dismantled the Castle Damari, and conveyed all the furniture (much of which was costly, and brought from Florence and Pisa) to the fortress. He treated his captives with a show of respect; appropriated to them the best chambers and the best furniture; for he was at once struck by the exquisite beauty of Agnes, and his plans with respect to them were not yet formed. His first object was to get rid of his allies. He therefore called them together, showed them how impossible it was for them all to subsist on the scanty resources of the island, and offered to divide at once the plunder that had been collected, so that they might return without delay by the galley to Genoa.

This offer was very willingly accepted; for, in truth, the limits they were confined to by no means suited their wild desires and roving habits. The plunder was divided, and the adventurers sailed for Genoa, leaving Campaldino and his lieutenant Achilles with not more than two hundred and fifty regular soldiers of the Republic and about fifty selected associates of their own.

Having settled all this to his satisfaction, the governor, after surveying the island, saw the remains of the old tower of Cauro, on the west side of the island, overlooking the extent

of sea between them and Corsica. This tower he repaired and strengthened, and gave it up to the command of Achilles, whom it suited exactly ; for now that Campaldino had acquired the title of governor, the rules of the fortress were rather too strict for his liking. Therefore, about a month after their conquest, Achilles established himself in the tower, where he passed his time in eating, drinking, sleeping, and occasionally making love to the maidens of Capraja, who were, and still are, remarkably pretty. So well, indeed, did Achilles manage the natives, being himself remarkably good-humoured and facetious, that he alone of the invaders was treated with common civility.

Campaldino now turned his attention to his captives, towards whom he observed every courtesy and attention. He allowed them their own servants, and even permitted the podesta, a fine old signor of good family, to visit them. In fact, Campaldino thought it possible he might gain the hand of his fair captive.

Though considerable plunder was taken in the Castle Damari, none of those chests full of treasure spoken of by Montoni were as yet found, though most diligently sought after. Up to this time he had not mentioned the subject to the Marchese, who, with his daughter, appeared overwhelmed with affliction at their repeated misfortunes. But the Genoese soon saw, by the look of horror with which Agnes beheld him, that her love would never be gained by him. Nevertheless, he resolved to see what the Marchese would say to the insidious offers he intended to make.

Taking an opportunity, when the Marchese was alone, Campaldino very coolly explained his views. He first of all began by saying he had received orders from the Genoese government to send the Marchese and his daughter to Genoa, to be there retained as state prisoners and hostages. Campaldino exulted inwardly, when he saw at a glance that this intelligence struck the Marchese with horror ; for, in secret, both he and his daughter looked for deliverance from Paoli on his return to Corsica.

“ There is but one way, Signor Marchese, to avoid the execution of these orders, which I see cause you much pain. I love your daughter.”

The Marchese started with astonishment and disgust. Nevertheless, Campaldino, with perfect self-possession, persisted.

“ United to your daughter,” resumed he, “ I will dismiss this garrison, restore the island to its original lord, and——”

“ Nay,” interrupted the Marchese, “ this cannot be. My daughter’s affections are already bestowed ; but I will make

you an offer which, in a pecuniary sense, will be ample amends for the loss of a maiden's hand whose heart you could never gain."

Campaldino remained silent, and the Marchese continued,— "Allow myself and daughter to embark in one of our fishing-boats for Corsica, or even Livorno, and I offer you the sum of a hundred thousand livres of Genoa."*

"Your offer, Marchese, is princely," returned the Genoese, with a very gratified smile, for his thoughts immediately centered upon the iron chests of treasure gained by the crusader; "but, allow me to observe, after having collected all the plunder of your castle, and shared it with my followers, as our right by conquest, where could so great a sum be procured as that which you offer me? I confess that I will willingly accept the amount mentioned, if you will only show or prove to me your power of paying such a sum."

Now the Marchese Damari, after all his trials and all his traffic with the world, was by no means a suspicious or a keen observer of his fellow men. He listened eagerly to the words of the crafty Genoese, who no sooner declared his willingness to accept the offer, than he called to his daughter Agnes, who was in the next chamber, to bring him his small cabinet. Agnes accordingly entered, bearing an ivory-and-ebony cabinet.

Campaldino rose and politely handed the maiden a seat. Agnes merely bowed, and was retiring, when the Marchese said,— "Your eyes, Agnes, are quicker than mine. Stay a moment with me and the Signor Campaldino."

Agnes shuddered every time she heard the name; for her lover, in reciting his adventures to her, had mentioned that very name as designating the leader of the Genoese forces in the invasion of Corsica; and she readily conjectured that their present conqueror might be either his son or other relative.

"The Signor Campaldino," resumed the Marchese, "has agreed to take ransom, restore us to liberty, and allow us to embark for Italy or Corsica."

Agnes clasped her hands with an exclamation of joy, while a bitter smile sat upon the lip of the Genoese.

"Open that cabinet, my love, and take me out the acknowledgements of Signor Filippo Tortoni, the Pisan banker."

Without thinking of aught but the delight of regaining their liberty, Agnes turned over several papers, picked out one on parchment, and handed it to her father, who, not bestowing a glance upon the document, presented it to the Genoese,

* About £5,000 at that period—a large sum then.

saying, "You will there, Signor Campaldino, see a sum lodged in my name of ten times the amount offercd you for our ransom."

Campaldino took the parchment and ran his eye over the contents. As he did so his face grew deadly pale, and then flushed like crimson. Agnes gazed at him in terror. His eye flashed and sparkled with emotion. At length, dropping the document, he fixed his single eye upon the maiden, exclaiming in a voice of exultation,—"How is this? Instead of the Marchese Damari do I behold the Signor Alviano, the Venetian merchant?"

Agnes appeared to be fainting. The Marchese called the Signora Tolmeo from the next chamber to assist his child; and still somewhat ignorant of the cause of the sudden faintness of his daughter, and the strange, excited tones of the Genoese, said, picking up the parchment,—"My daughter has committed a trifling error; that money was lodged in the name of Alviano, which I bore for five and thirty years, twenty of which I resided in Byzantium. She gave you the old document. Since I succeeded my brother—the late Marchese Damari—the money has been placed under my proper name. Here," and the Marchese took a similar paper from the cabinet, "is the proper document."

"So then," exclaimed the Genoese, scarcely heeding the words of the Marchese, but turning to Agnes, and fixing upon her a look of triumph, "in you, the daughter of the *ci-devant* merchant Alviano, I behold the betrothed of my deadliest foe, the rebel Paoli."

"Yes," replied the maiden, rising to quit the room, and fixing a glance of scorn upon the excited countenance of the Genoese, "the betrothed, not of the rebel Paoli, but the glorious deliverer of his country from the cruelty, oppression, and treachery of your countrymen."

"I am fortunate, noble lady," returned the Genoese, with a malicious smile, "in gaining the prize I have; for, leave this fortress, except as the wife of Campaldino, you never shall."

"That day will never arrive, signor. Sooner than endure, for a single hour, the name of one so base and cowardly, I will be borne to my grave. Come, dearest father," continued Agnes, taking the arm of her bewildered parent, "let us leave our jailer to the contrivance of plans, which I feel assured Heaven, in its own good time, will defeat."

Campaldino laughed aloud as the captives left the chamber.

"So, my gentle damsel," ruminated he, "you crow loudly, in truth, and threaten bravely. But *patienza, patienza*. This time I have the ball at my own foot."

Leaving the chamber, he proceeded to the guardroom, where he found his lieutenant, Achilles Furiani.

“What’s in the wind now, governor?” demanded Furiani, looking into his commander’s countenance. “What has ruffled you?”

“Nothing but the excitement caused by a freak of Dame Fortune, who has turned a spoke of her wheel in my favour at last. By the mass, I have found the treasure we have so vainly sought.”

“*Corpo di Bacco!* Do you say so?” exclaimed Achilles, rubbing his huge hands in great glee. “How and where?”

“Why, in the daughter of the Marchese Damari.”

The visage of the lieutenant changed into a woeful expression. “*Diavolo!* a treasure of beauty I allow, governor; but that is a treasure you can’t divide.”

“Nevertheless, Furiani,” returned Campaldino, “as you have hitherto shared my plunder you shall share in this. But you are in error. I have, in truth, gained a treasure in gold, in addition to the maiden, in securing whom I shall gratify my vengeance against Paoli, who I thought had escaped me for ever.”

“*Cento Diavoli!*” was all Achilles could reply, but he looked unutterable things.

“Who, think you, is this lady Agnes Damari?” demanded the governor.

“Body of the world!” ejaculated Achilles, “I told you I never had a head fit for anything except standing hard knocks, and for defying the strength of a hamper of Cyprus; but as to riddles, I want none of them. That unfortunate rascal Montoni, who was ass enough to let his brains be knocked out by a crowbar, was the man for riddles. Speak out and don’t keep me in suspense. I long for something substantial that will last me for the rest of my life, for I begin to think I shall exhaust the wines of this island before something better turns up.”

The governor then related to his lieutenant the scene that had taken place between him and his captives.

Achilles was more puzzled than ever. How the Marchese Damari could be the merchant Alviano of Byzantium, of whom he had often heard Montoni speak, completely stupefied him, especially as the past night had been spent in a deep carouse with his associates, who, by great good luck, had stopped a vessel the day before laden with Sicilian wines for Bastia, and which Achilles seized upon, giving to the distracted padrone of the Tartano, as a reason for doing so, that he had no business to take in a cargo of wine, especially for a hostile port,

To a question of Achilles as to how it was possible such a transformation could take place as that of the Venetian merchant into the Marchese Damari, Campaldino replied that with the how he very little troubled himself ; it was of no manner of consequence. He was satisfied he held captive a man who actually possessed sufficient wealth lodged in bank to purchase a principality for them both.

“Of the wealth you shall have a fair share, added he ; “but the maiden falls to my lot alone. In forcing her to become my wife the dearest wish of my heart will be gratified.”

At that moment the *ci-devant* podesta of Capraja was ushered into the room. The old man bowed low, as the governor, turning towards him, demanded, curtly enough, the cause of his entrance, as it was not one of the days appointed for his visits to the Marchese and his daughter.

“Tis true, your eccellenza, it is not ; but I come to request a favour, hoping you will not refuse to grant it, as it is in a religious point of view I ask this favour, and essential to the happiness of the simple natives of this island.”

“Take a seat, signor,” said the governor, “and let me hear your request. I by no means wish to be harsh to your countrymen ; but let me, at the same time, remind you that the sum specified by yourself as the tribute I levied is now two months due.”

“Signor—your eccellenza I mean—I come to speak about that also. We are poor, very poor ; nevertheless we are willing to sacrifice all we possess of value to keep up old customs.”

“Be so good as to explain, Signor Buttaficcio,” said the governor.

“Well, your eccellenza, I will do so. In the time of Otho Damari, the crusader—”

“*Corpo di Bacco !*” ejaculated Furiani, starting to his feet, “I shall be choked with thirst if you carry us back to the times of the crusader. I will leave your eccellenza to listen to the worthy Signor Buttaficcio, and just wet my lips with a flask of the poor wine of this country.”

So saying, Achilles, who detested long prosy stories, left the chamber.

“Now go on, Signor Buttaficcio,” said the governor. “My good lieutenant is a remarkably thirsty individual—a disease brought on, he says, by the scorching he got by wearing armour under the burning sun in our colony of Pera.”

“So it seems, your eccellenza,” quietly observed the ex-podesta. “Your worthy lieutenant has declared the Sicilian barque loaded with wine forfeited because she was bound for Bastia.”

“It was an error of his,” gravely replied the governor, “but I fear it may not now be remedied. It shall not, however, occur again. Such things will happen in conquests till affairs get into their right place. Vessels that anchor here must be protected, especially as a very good revenue is collected for harbour dues. But pray come to the subject of your visit.”

“I was saying, your eccellenza, that in the time of Otho Damari, the crusader, a frightful tempest and convulsion of the earth took place in this island. The inhabitants thought the island would be swallowed up. Fire burst out of the ground in several places, and a shower of burning ashes fell all over the country. The crusader was a pious man, and brought from the Holy Land, when he returned, a piece of the true and blessed cross. In the midst of this frightful convulsion he took the relic from its case, and also several other blessed reliques of the saints, such as the toe-nail of the blessed St. Agatha, a hair of the head of St. John the Baptist, and several others, and, assembling all the inhabitants, they formed a procession, with the reliques in front, and ascended to the mount on which now stands the chapel of this fortress. They placed the reliques on the ground, which heaved and rocked every moment; and the crusader vowed, if the island was saved, to build a chapel on the spot where the reliques stood, dedicated to St. John the Baptist—for it was then St. John’s eve—to endow it with a yearly sum to support six friars, and that a procession should take place yearly on the morning of St. John’s eve by the principal inhabitants of the island, clothed in white mantles and hoods, and that each person should deposit upon the altar of the chapel the sum of one livre, as an offering to be laid out in the decorations of the chapel.

“Well, your eccellenza, it pleased Heaven to spare the island. The crusader founded the handsome chapel that now stands within the walls of this fortress, which was built afterwards by the crusader; he also erected a house within the town as a convent for the six friars, one of whom daily attends, with the permission of your eccellenza, to celebrate mass within the chapel, to the garrison. St. John’s eve now approaches, and the inhabitants of this island, who are a simple, untaught race, and devotedly attached to their old customs and ceremonies, have begged me to solicit your eccellenza for permission to visit and pray in the chapel on St. John’s day, and to deposit their annual offerings; and if granted yearly, they are willing to pay a livre a head tribute money, to be distributed amongst the soldiers of your eccellenza’s garrison. To solicit this permission is the cause of my intrusion.”

The age we write of was in every way a religious and superstitious one. All ceremonies connected with the relics of saints were eagerly attended by priest, layman, and soldier; and none were more ardent in apparent devotion than the lawless bands of adventurers who were to be found scattered over the face of entire Europe.

Campaldino saw nothing in the wish of the Caprese beyond a devotional one; nor was there, in fact, any other. Resistance, or any scheme to recover their liberty, was totally out of the question. So vigorous, indeed, was Campaldino's search for arms, that he scarcely left the inhabitants the instruments necessary for their domestic purposes. Besides, all armour, and warlike stores, and weapons were deposited in the armoury of the fortress. He therefore willingly agreed to let the ceremony take place, provided the tribute due to him by agreement was payed three days before St. John's eve.

Greatly pleased at having gained the object of his visit, the Signor Buttaficcio withdrew, bowing to the very floor.

CHAPTER XLII.

ADVENTURES OF THE ELDER PAOLI.

IN a chamber of one of the handsomest palaces built by the Genoese in the city of Bastia, late in the evening, sat General Paoli and his son. Our hero had just been relating to his father, who had been appointed, by the united voice of the whole island, their podesta, or governor, a full account of all his adventures since he left the island. They were now consulting and planning an expedition against Capraja.

Our hero was against attempting the reduction of the island by an open assault; for, so strong was the fortress by situation and artificial defences, that resistance, even by a small garrison, might easily be prolonged for weeks, perhaps months; and during that time, such was Campaldino's hatred and desire of revenge against Paoli, that it was impossible to say what the consequences might be to his Agnes and her father.

"You are right, Giacinto," said the general, after a few moments' thought. "I am inclined to adopt your plan of surprisal, by entering the island through the very passage by which this Campaldino, however he obtained the knowledge, won the fortress. There is this difference, however, and you must not lose sight of it. The present Marchese Damari is a man of peace. Old Buttaficcio, the podesta, though one of the kindest-hearted men living, is no soldier—it is very evident that, bold, high-spirited, and ardently devoted to liberty as the Caprese are, a most negligent guard of the fortress was

kept. Now, Campaldino is a soldier, not only bold and daring, but crafty and suspicious like his father. You cannot expect to find the fortress with its bridge down, its portcullis raised, and scarcely a watch kept. Nevertheless, something may turn up in your favour which you do not at present see. While you enter the island through that strange range of caverns which you and Count Sampiero discovered when almost boys, I will keep off the island in a galley, with a force sufficient to take the fortress if you fail. By your hoisting a signal, I shall understand you require my assistance. Strange that the son should have an influence over your destiny nearly as great as his crafty father had over mine."

"You promised me, dear father, that the first time we had an evening to ourselves you would give a more minute detail of your adventures than you could possibly do the last time we met. I cannot, at this moment, settle my mind fully upon my expedition to Capraja ; but in the quiet hours of the night will bring my confused thoughts to some kind of determination. At all events, I will delay no longer than to-morrow night. I only wait my cousin Otho's arrival. Now, dear sir, let me hear how you contrived to perform a feat that always, to me, appeared astonishing—namely, your escape from the state prison of Genoa."

"You will find nothing surprising in that part, my son," replied the elder Paoli. "However, you shall have all my adventures. The getting out of the prison was a freak of fortune.

"Mastino Campaldino," began the general, "was by far the craftiest of all the commanders sent by Genoa into Corsica. He resolved to try bribery and corruption, and, for a time, he was baffled ; for, of all nations, our countrymen set the least value on gold. But just as he was thinking of abandoning this project, the villain Luigi Antonetti fell into his hands. The moment he saw this man, and learned his connections, he was satisfied that his plan would work. The traitor was offered the estates of his cousin Sampiero on certain conditions, and thus he became a spy and traitor. To follow up the plan intended, the villain was allowed to escape, as it were, and was even hunted by the soldiers of Campaldino, while a reward was offered for his apprehension. I received him as a fugitive, and he sold me and his country, by betraying the secret entrance into the citadel of Corte. Campaldino conceived it would be a death-blow to our cause were he to hang those chiefs who fell into his hands at Corte ; at the same time he resolved, as a masterly stroke, to send me secretly to Genoa, and give out that he had put me to death. If that did not succeed he still had me as a hostage, to use as he saw occasion.

I was accordingly embarked in a galley sailing for Genoa, and placed in the state prison, one of the strongest fortresses in Ligurian territory. There for two years I remained, hopeless of ever recovering my liberty, when, by one of those unforeseen events that at times baffle all human foresight, I escaped from durance.

“One morning early the prison was surrounded by a furious and excited mob, composed of all the artizans and lower orders of Genoa, whose amount is wonderful. All the prisons of Genoa were broken into by these fantastic lovers of liberty, who had first murdered as many of their nobility as were opposed to the faction of the Grimaldi, and driven the rest out of the city, elected a new Doge, and by way of finish to this, I am told, not unusual outbreak, determined to liberate all the prisoners without distinction or inquiry. Some of the captives, well known, and of their own party, were carried in triumph through the city ; others, myself amongst the rest, were told to shift for ourselves. Astounded by the uproar, confusion, and devastation, I rushed, as soon as I learned how matters stood, along with a hundred others, out into the streets. I was not very strong, as you may suppose, and with difficulty made my way amid the mob of rioters. I picked up, in the confusion, a mantle and a cap, with which I invested myself.

“My first object was to get outside the city ; and, by asking a few questions, I managed to issue forth by the gate leading into that princely suburb, San Pietro d’Arena. What to do next I knew not, being totally ignorant of the country, and without a fraction of money, or any article to convert into money. I was puzzled. On one side of me rose those magnificent palaces which for a league stretch to the westward after leaving the city. On the other side was a glorious sea, sparkling and rippling in the bright sun. If I had had but a boat, and a little water and bread, twenty-four hours would have seen me on my native shores, for a fine breeze of Tramontana flew over the water I gazed on so anxiously. I walked on, however, resolving to get as far as possible from Genoa ; but, unaccustomed to exercise, I was completely knocked up when I got to the village of Pagia, for so I learned it was called.

“Seating myself on a rock, I could proceed no further, I looked around me anxiously. At length, I became drowsy with the noise and murmur of the waves on the beach, and the hum of voices from the village. After having dozed awhile, I was roused by a voice close behind me saying, ‘*Salve figlio mio !* You look ill and careworn. Can I assist you ?’ I turned, startled, to the side whence the voice came, and perceived,

standing by me, a wandering friar of the Capuchin order. He was a man past middle age, with a kind and benevolent countenance. He wore a long brown habit, with a hood, simply fastened round the waist by a knotted cord; his feet and legs were bare, and over his shoulder he carried a large and apparently well-filled wallet.

“‘In truth, padre,’ I replied, ‘I am sick, weary, and hungry; and know not where to seek relief from ony one of those three evils.’ ‘Nay, *figlio*, Heaven provides help, even when we, miserable sinners, think it most distant. Lo, hear am I, sent by Providence to remove those ills of which you complain, because I conceive the two first arise from hunger and thirst. Here are the means to satisfy both.’ The good father quickly sat down by my side and opened his wallet, from which he took sundry eatables, and a small stone jar of very good wine. ‘Now, *figlio mio*,’ said he, with a smile, ‘in the name of the blessed saints, begin. My wallet was filled this very morning at the palace of the good Countess De Lera, and you are as welcome to share it as my poor brethren of our very poor convent; for we are of the begging order of Capuchins.’

“I thanked the worthy friar from my heart, for his store was, in truth, most welcome. He ate sparingly himself, and drank not from the jar, which he said was only for the sick and weary, but from a clear, sparkling stream that issued from the lofty rocks to lose itself in the sands at our feet. ‘You are not,’ said the friar, ‘one of this land, I know by your tongue, though your Italian is purer than ours. Whence do you come? You look as if you had suffered from long confinement.’ I had no hesitation in stating the truth to the padre, who listened to my recital with attention and interest. ‘*Figlio mio*,’ said he, ‘I rejoice at your escape. I love not war and the cruelties it leads to. Heaven knows, we ought not to covet the land of the stranger; for what with our own broils and rivalry we can scarcely keep our own. Worn out and weak as you are you could never cross our mountains into another territory, and, no doubt, so important a captive will be eagery sought after. Come with me to our poor convent. You will be tended with care, and receive part of our homely food; and when you are well and strong you can depart, and none of us will say *Whence came ye?* or *Whither do ye go?* Then, in one of our habits, with God’s blessing, you will be able to reach a place of safety.’ I attempted to thank him, but he stopped me, saying, ‘We live, my son, by charity. If we did not obey; by our practice, that Divine inspiration, could we expect our own wants to be supplied?’

“Assisted by my kind friend I reached his convent, built

upon the side of a steep hill behind the sweet village of Pagia. The padre, simply introducing me as one who required rest and shelter, led me to his own cell, one of the friars bringing a pallet for me to rest on.

“Here I remained for ten days, which completely restored me. The good padre would listen for hours to my narrative of our struggles for liberty; and I faithfully promised, if it pleased God to restore me to my country, and we regained our freedom, I would establish a convent of begging Capuchins on some part of the island. Being now sufficiently recovered, I felt anxious to get out of the Genoese territory. My pious friends furnished me with a Capuchin gown and hood, and a wallet well stored. I embraced the whole fraternity, and could not help shedding a tear as I parted from Padre Gavotti, who certainly possessed the real milk of human kindness in his heart. I had studied well my road, from a very fairly-drawn map of the mountains by one of the brethren, for they all, by turns, start on a begging pilgrimage for two or three months.

“In a week I made my way to Turin, where I cast off my Capuchin habit, which had supported me the whole time. In that city dwelt several of our Corsican exiles with their families. I was, as you may suppose, received with open arms. From the Signor Pasquale Rivalora, a Corsican advanced in life, and who had settled with his family many years back in Turin, I learned all that had taken place during my captivity; for you may be certain how my heart panted to gain some intelligence of you, my beloved son. I heard of your gallant resistance; the death of Campaldino by your hand, and your successful escape from Corsica. There was a rumour also that the natives had again risen in arms, headed by your gallant cousin, Sampiero. I need not tell you I burned to be amongst the patriots; and having been furnished with funds by the Signor Pasquale, I made my way over the mountains through Acqui, and reached Nice, where I procured a barque and sailed for Corsica.

“Thus you see, my dear boy, my adventures were simple, and unattended with any risk. Since the fall of Bastia, and the total defeat of our enemies, I have endeavoured to establish a treaty of commerce and peace with France, and hope to succeed. Genea, alone, can never hope to cope with us again. We must now take warning from the past, and following the example of our foes, build defences to our harbours, supply ourselves with arms and warlike stores, and above all, avoid that rock upon which we have hitherto split—dissension and disunion amongst ourselves.”

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE EXPEDITION.

ON a bright unclouded evening in the latter end of August a large zebec left the harbour of Mariana, and, with a steady breeze from the westward, shaped her course for Capraja. On board this vessel was our hero, his cousin Count Otho Sampiero, and fifty picked men, amongst whom were Pulini, Luca Manifesto, and Juliano. The two latter had earnestly entreated to accompany the expedition. Luca Manifesto, after our hero's arrival in Corsica, had been established on the general's estate of Frealo ; his son Guido resided with his parents ; but Paoli determined, the moment he became settled, to take the boy into his own homestead.

On board the zebec were arms for nearly a hundred men, besides arms for the fifty men selected.

All were in high spirits, and animated with the most sanguine hopes of success. It was the intention of Giacinto to make the island during the night, and before the return of day land all the men, arms, etc., in the vast caverns known to him. The zebec was then to retire from the island during the day, and at sunset to stand in for the cavern and watch for any of the signals appointed to be made. It was a season of the year when long-continued fine weather prevails in the Mediterranean, interrupted, perhaps only for a few hours, by a thunder-storm.

Antonio, the old Caprese fisherman, and his son, returned with them. Their craft, a long and strong fishing-boat, and capable of landing the whole party in two trips, was towed astern.

Count Sampiero was a fine high-spirited youth, whose bravery had been early displayed in defence of his native land. Like most of the Corsican nobility of that period, he had passed several years on the continent. Those years were spent by the count with his powerful kinsman, the Colonna, in Rome.

"It is nearly ten years," observed Sampiero, laying his hand on the shoulder of his cousin, who was wrapt in a fit of thought, "since you, and I, and Pulini, and a hardy crew, visited the caverns to which we are now bound. How little could we imagine that the discovery of these caves, when seeking a place of refuge from a tremendous thunder-storm, would be hereafter of so much consequence. Do you think you perfectly remember the spot?"

"It is scarcely possible, Otho," returned Paoli, "to mistake

the singular rock that divides the entrance to the caverns. It was its resemblance of a huge eagle, with its wings extended, that first drew my attention to it ; but had you not shot an immense raven, we should never have discovered the caverns behind it, inasmuch as the entrance into those vast dens is so remarkably intricate and insignificant."

"Ah, signor," exclaimed old Antonio, the Caprese, who was standing by the man at the helm, and who had heard the above conversation, "I know the rock you speak of now ; for I have fished for hours close off it, and often observed to my son the tremendous roar of the ground-swell within. But that is during the winter. The water within must now be as still as a lake."

"Your late chief," said Paoli, turning to the Caprese, who had just relieved the man at the helm, "was not of a warlike disposition, but rather inclined towards tranquillity. It is strange that the Genoese never attempted to take the island during his lifetime."

"Alas, signor, for what purpose could those greedy republicans want our little bit of land, which is not sufficient to give food for its simple inhabitants ? As to gold or silver, the saints be praised, we have but little, and have lived very happily without them. Our young men mostly depart as sailors to various parts of the continent ; those that remain become fishermen, and carry what they take to Elba, Corsica, and oftentimes to Pisa and Livorno."

"Your late chief, nevertheless, was a wealthy noble," remarked Paoli.

"He was a pious and good man, and the saints interceded for him, signor. As to wealth, he did possess riches ; for his lady was a wealthy Italian heiress ; but he spent a great part in building the fortress and chapel. Castle Damari, a noble mansion, was erected, we are told, after the Tuscan mode of palaces, to please his noble lady. Then all the costly furniture, and mirrors, and grand statues and pictures, were brought from the continent. Alas ! alas ! signor, those cursed spoilers, that are now in the fortress, stripped the castle of every article, and divided the plunder. Nothing but the bare walls is left to look upon now. Our present chief, signor, I have heard say, has vast sums of money in foreign parts ; and it is whispered that these robbers must have heard this, somehow ; or what could tempt such hungry vultures to make a descent upon our little island ?"

"Your island, my good fellow," said our hero, "is of much more importance than you imagine. In the power of Genoa, it would soon be turned into a place of considerable traffic. It

possesses a fine haven, always full of shipping during the winter months, besides being a key to Corsica. Your wine is equal to if not finer than any of the Sicilian. There is a chapel—is there not?—dedicated to St. John, now enclosed within the walls of the fortress, and some ceremony connected with it."

"Yes, signor," replied the Caprese, "very precious relics are contained in that chapel. But the annual procession to visit the shrine will, I fear, be stopped by those *maladetto* Genoese."

"Let me see," said Paoli, thoughtfully, and turning to his cousin, "this is Monday—next Friday, therefore, is St. John's day."

"I see, Giacinto," observed Otho; "you have got some plan in your head with respect to that ceremony and procession to the chapel."

"Yes, if the procession is allowed to take place," responded Paoli, "advantage may be taken of it. All I require is to gain a footing in the fortress. The gates once ours, the rest is easy. But, by all accounts, this entrance, if not taken by surprise, is almost impregnable. The drawbridge falls over a precipice of nearly a hundred feet perpendicular; and a ponderous portcullis beside; and the path to the bridge is so narrow that only two persons can walk abreast."

"By Jove, there will be something to do," exclaimed Sampiero; "and report speaks of Mastino as a crafty and skilful commander."

"We must use stratagem, Otho; otherwise, the siege will be a prolonged one. But see, the breeze freshens, and the moon rises bright and clear to the eastward. We shall make the island in less than an hour. In fact, it looms now like a dark mass of rock against the moon's rays."

Paoli was not far out. In little more than an hour the zebec ran in under the high rugged rocks of Capraja, and, lowering her sails, dropt an anchor. The sea being perfectly smooth, she lay within five hundred yards of the shore.

Paoli immediately manned the boat, and, with his cousin and Antonio, the Caprese, they pulled close into the rocks—for it was on the western shore, facing Corsica, that the caverns were situated.

A very short time sufficed to discover the marks. The Eagle Rock was then found, and, having examined the entrance, and fully satisfied themselves they were right, they returned aboard.

In two hours both men and arms were safely landed on a shingly beach at the mouth of the principal cavern. There being no tide in the Mediterranean, the boat was hauled up

only a few feet from the water's edge ; and then, prepared torches being lighted, the men cheerfully carried the provisions, arms, and fuel to an inner cavern, of which the immense extent astonished all those of the party who had never seen the place before.

It became very evident, after a few moments' investigation, that it was through these caverns the Genoese had entered the island. Remains of large fires were strewed over the sands, and one or two broken weapons, such as those used by the Genoese soldiers, were also found.

Leaving the men busy in lighting a fire and preparing a meal, Paoli, with Otho Sampiero, Pulini, and the Caprese, carrying pine-wood torches, examined those wonderful natural vaults. Some were lofty and beautifully arched, almost leading the beholder to imagine they were the work of man. One cave led into another, in an apparently endless succession and variety. At length Paoli succeeded in tracing, by the marks of feet, and other signs, the passage that led into the interior of the island. It was a narrow and somewhat crooked and rugged succession of natural stepping-stones—in some places difficult of access, and requiring strength and activity to surmount. There were evident traces that, at times, the passage served for a mountain torrent to find its way to the sea.

After half-an-hour's scrambling, accompanied by a few falls, which threatened, at one time, to leave them to find their way back in total darkness, they came to the mouth of the passage, which was concealed by an entangled mass of various kinds of low and luxuriant underwood. Leaving their torches safely in a fissure of the rock, they pushed their way, with some difficulty, through the brambles, and stood fairly within the island, on a hill looking down into a valley of about two miles in extent.

Nothing could exceed the astonishment of Antonio, the Caprese. In a moment he recognised the hill on which they stood. The moon was then high in the heavens, and threw a flood of silvery light over the whole valley beneath them, while they, standing under an immense and lofty rock that hung over the entrance of the cave, were in deep shadow.

"This is most strange, signor," observed the old fisherman ; "had we but known that the Genoese had thus entered the island, they would never, few as they really were, have conquered us that night. We were stricken with fear, signor ; for we thought they were not human beings ; and, when we did come to blows, we imagined they were protected by sorcery and magic."

"You know the island well, Antonio, no doubt," observed

Paoli. "Could you take me from here to the house of your late podesta without traversing the town or habitable part of the island?"

"You need not be seen by a single human being. To the right, signor, on the summit of yon hill, about a mile off, you see the tower of Cauro. There are twenty men in that tower, with an officer. At the foot of this hill we are upon lies the road from the tower to the Castle Damari. You can discern, signor, its towers rising over that clump of tall trees at the far end of the valley. From the castle to the town it is not half a mile. By going to the south of the castle, by a narrow path, you can reach the back of the town, for the houses all run along the beach of the inner harbour; and many of the best residences—especially that of the podesta—have large gardens extending far up the hill above the harbour. I can therefore take you in broad daylight, without any risk, to the podesta's house, by the back of the castle."

"That will answer my purpose well," returned Paoli. "What say you, Otho, to a stgoll to the castle? It is not more than a mile and half across the valley, and Antonio says there is a direct path at the foot of this hill."

"Most willingly," replied the young count. "I shall not sleep this night; and I feel a desire to have a peep by moonlight into the castle of the stout crusader."

Pulini would have said it was a useless risk; but, knowing of old how fruitless it was to advise caution to his somewhat headstrong master, he contented himself by proposing to go with them.

To this his master objected, and insisted on his and Antonio's return to the caverns, instructing them to place a massive wax torch, which they had brought with them, in a split of the rock at the entrance, and materials to strike a light.

Having thus settled how they were to return, the two young men left both squire and fisherman, and proceeded carelessly down the hill, which was of easy descent—being, in fact, a sheep-walk—for, as they went on, numbers of those animals, and also of goats, for which Capraja is famous, started up out of their path.

At the foot of the hill—for neither hedges, walls, nor fences were in their way—they came upon the road leading from the town up to the tower of Cauro.

It was a still and lovely night, and the moon threw a flood of light over the valley. In half-an-hour they came up with the noble belt of trees encircling Castle Damari on three sides. Turning the wood, they reached the front of the castle, as Antonio had indicated. The building was more after the

fashion of the Italian villas than an embattled mansion; still, the towers and bastions of the crusader's castle remained, and somewhat oddly—though by no means disagreeably—mixed in with the modern building. Neither ditch, moat, nor bridge was seen. Along a stately facade ran a row of pillars; and a marble portico, of great height and classic form, gave entrance to the mansion. The large doors were gone, excepting some pieces, which were still attached to the massive hinges. As the young men continued their observations, they perceived evidences that the mansion had undergone a kind of siege. The pillars, in places, were defaced; the windows, of beautiful form and of stained glass—a rarity at that period in so remote a locality—were broken and shattered; and signs of desperate strife were still visible everywhere.

"They must have made a very tolerable fight of it," said Sampiero, " notwithstanding they thought their enemies gifted with sorcery. Let us have a look at the inside."

Paoli did not reply, for his thoughts were at that moment with Agnes.

Passing beneath the portico, they entered the spacious hall, along each side of which ran a range of marble pillars, supporting a lofty gallery, the further end illuminated by an immense gothic window of stained glass, through which the moon's rays fell dimly upon all within, leaving many places in deep shadow. Between each pillar of the hall stood the carved figure of a warrior, looking, in the uncertain light, like the grim guardians of the crusader's hall; while above floated the remains of several torn and defaced banners. This air of desolation affected the young men with sombre thoughts, from which they were startled by the tread of a heavy foot in the porch.

"Keep in the deep shadow," whispered Sampiero; "your figure and height are remarkable. If spoken to, and this intruder be a Genoese, let me answer."

Paoli stepped behind a pillar in deep obscurity, and Otho Sampiero turning, beheld, standing in the doorway, a tall man in breastplate and helmet—for the moon's rays fell full upon him from the casement opposite. As Otho turned, a deep, full voice exclaimed,—

"What ho, there! Come forth, whoever you are. No skulking, or, by the mass, if I go in to hunt you out, I'll lay the flat of my sword on your back in a way that will make you smart. *Cospetto!* who are you, lurking about here after the hour?"

Quietly drawing his sword, Otho advanced towards the speaker. His attire was, purposely, very simple, and neither

armour nor arms had he, excepting the plain sword he carried in his hand. Though the stranger was standing in the full light, Otho Sampiero's features and figure were but dimly perceptible.

"And who the *diavolo* are you ?" exclaimed the man, stepping a pace back. "And armed, too ! How is this ? By the immortal Jove, you will pay for your intrusion, or my name is not Achilles Furiani !"

"Signor Achilles Furiani, if that is your eccellenza's name," replied the young count, "I crave your pardon for a poor artist who prefers studying the picturesque, like your worship, to taking men's honest rest."

"Studying the devil !" roughly answered the Genoese ; "I never studied anything more picturesque than a hamper of good wine, or a goodly town to be sacked and pillaged. An artist, are you ? How the devil did you get here ? What has an artist to do with a sword ? If you are a native, which I doubt, for I never beheld you before, you are liable to a fine, first, for being out after the hour allowed ; next, a heavier penalty for having a sword. Give me that weapon in the first place, and then follow me. Are you alone ? I certainly heard some one speaking as I was passing."

"We artists, Signor Furiani, often indulge ourselves in speaking when alone. I was talking to the dead."

"*Corpo di Bacco !*" hastily interrupted the Genoese, "you are not in earnest, are you ? Is the ghost of the old crusader troubling his old halls ?"

"So they say, signor," quietly, and with a smile, replied Otho. "But I was not talking to so distinguished a ghost ; I was merely apostrophizing the dead, who, in my imagination, once peopled this mansion. Here is the sword, Signor Achilles ; I picked it up, and suppose it must have been left here by some of the late combatants. As to who I am, if you wait till to-morrow, the ex-podesta, Signor Buttaficcio, will inform you. In reference to the fines, I freely offer you these ten dollars to pardon my strange habits. The coin will be much better, Signor Furiani, in your pocket than in the public fund, which they would doubtless be to-morrow, when you would be obliged to disclose my offence to your commander."

Money was one of the idols which the worthy Achilles adored. At the mention of ten dollars, a sum five times the amount of the fine, he rubbed his hands together, and, with a quiet laugh, replied,—

"By the mass, worthy artist—if such you are—you are a sensible fellow, notwithstanding this whim of yours in studying the picturesque. Ha ! ha ! ha !"

And he laughed heartily as the count quietly placed the money in his huge hand.

"This," resumed he, "is substantial at all events. Keep the sword, my friend—it is of little value, I see—and keep this meeting of ours to yourself. Study away, *amico*. Give my respects to the shade of the crusader, should he happen to pay you a visit; and remember—my name is Achilles Furiani; my quarters are in the old tower of Cauro; and if you will take the trouble of mounting the hill, I will give you a hearty welcome, for you seem a very decent and well-bred youth, and we will contrive to empty a flask or two to our better acquaintance. Now, listen to me. As you live with old Buttaficcio—a relation I suppose, eh?—just say to his pretty nice Annette that"—and here the giant heaved a tremendous sigh—"Achilles Furiani is dying for love of her. *Corpo di Bacco!* I am grown so thin from pining that the straps of my cuirass have had four fresh holes made to tighten it on me. Adieu, my worthy!—the night wears away. Don't forget to visit me."

"Never doubt it," replied Otho, with a smile. "I will visit you, Signor Furiani, and, depend upon it, we will crack something more than a flask between us. *Addio.*"

Furiani repeated his adieu; and, turning away, his figure was lost beneath the deep shade of the lofty trees.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE EX-PODESTA AND HIS NIECES

AFTER the departure of the Genoese adventurer, Otho Sam-piero rejoined Paoli.

"By the Pope, Giacinto," said the young count, laughing, "that's a monstrous big fellow. I do believe if I, unluckily, had not had the gold about me I must have measured swords with him."

"You managed admirably, Otho. Any broil would have been ruinous to us. To have slain him would have betrayed some plot meditated by the natives; and to have carried him a prisoner to our cave would have been out of the question; had I gone forth to meet him, I must have had a contest with him; for, strange as it may appear to you, that is the very officer who commanded the troop that made me prisoner at Pera. To do him justice, he was humane enough. He sent at once for a leech, and left directions that I should be well tended. I heard his name afterwards, and there is no doubt he would have recognized me at once. But we must be stirring in a few minutes, when the moon will be down, and we

can then cross the valley without being observed, even should this man suspect you are not what you represented yourself to be. We must, however, guard against discovery to-morrow, and be with the Signor Buttaficcio early, before our worthy Achilles has time to make inquiries."

"Do not be alarmed about that, Giacinto," returned Sampiero; "the fear of having to share the gold with his worthy commander will keep him quiet. So now let us be moving."

The young men crossed the valley, ascended the hill, and easily found the entrance to the cave. Pushing back the brambles, they went in and there found Pulini and the others wrapped in their rough mantles and sound asleep. The squire started to his feet in an instant, with an exclamation against his drowsiness.

"So you would wait for us, Pulini?" said Paoli, smiling kindly upon his faithful attendant. "In truth I guessed as much."

After a rough scramble over the difficulties of the path, the party reached the caverns, and found almost all the men wrapped in their cloaks, fast asleep round the dying embers of the fires; for, though the month was August, the vaults were extremely cold.

Luca Manifesto and Juliano were sitting apart, keeping up a good fire, and preparing a supper for their young chiefs against their return.

Otho Sampiero, being of a lively and high-spirited disposition, seemed highly to enjoy their present expedition. Seating himself by the fire, he willingly commenced an assault upon the good things before him, and Paoli followed his example. Then, wrapping themselves in their mantles, they endeavoured to get an hour's repose. With nothing to disturb his thoughts, Otho soon fell into a sound slumber. Not so Paoli, whose mind was too busy with the events to come—too full of deep anxiety concerning his betrothed—to think of sleep. He lay quietly beside his sleeping friend. A profound stillness reigned around, broken only by the breathing of the sleepers, and the low murmur of the gentle ripple as it broke gently on the beach in the outer caverns.

At length the dull grey light stole gradually within the caverns; the lights had expired, and, as the daylight increased, the men roused from their slumbers and started to their feet. Some immediately kindled fires for cooking; others went out to bathe in the clear and sparkling water which gently flowed to their feet; while others took their arms and cleared them from the moisture which had fallen on them during the night.

Paoli now roused his cousin; and, after a simple breakfast, they each put on a shirt of mail beneath their garments, and

covering their persons with the common coarse mantles worn by the natives, they summoned Antonio to conduct them to the mansion of the Signor Buttaficcio. Pulini alone accompanied them. Luca Manifesto received from Paoli full instructions how to act in case they should not return by midnight. Then, calling the men together, our hero desired them to follow the directions he had left with Manifesto, and on no account to show themselves in the outer cavern during the day, for fear some passing fisherman might observe them and give the alarm.

Having cautiously examined, from the mouth of the cavern, that the coast was clear, and no person within view, our party emerged from the thick coppice which grew around the aperture, and descended the hill. Their guide then struck into a very narrow bye-path, leading through some rich pastures and extensive vineyards. They continued thus across the valley without meeting any one; though, in the distance, they observed several of the natives coming out to their occupations in the fields. They next ascended a tolerably steep hill, crossed another valley extremely rich in vines, and climbed another and higher hill.

"From the summit of this, signor," observed Antonio, "you will have a fine view of the town and fortress, which lie immediately beneath us. I have taken you a great circuit purposely to avoid meeting any of my townsfolk, which might be inconvenient."

"Yes," returned Paoli; "if possible you must avoid being recognized for a few days, when, please God, we will free this beautiful little island from its invaders."

In half an hour they reached the summit of the height, and were enchanted with the extent and beauty of the view disclosed to their gaze. Around them frisked innumerable goats. The appearance of these animals in nearly every part of the island has given it its name. The town of Capraja consisted of many handsome mansions, considering the place and the number of inhabitants. Several of the houses had large gardens, extending up the gentle acclivity whereon the town is built, and which surmounts the beach bounding the waters of the inner harbour. The outlet into the exterior roadstead is extremely narrow, and bounded on each side by high ranges of rugged rocks. Across this entrance, at the period of our tale, a ponderous chain extended to a tower on the opposite side, preventing any attempt to land an enemy; for nowhere on the rocks of the outward haven could an assailant land and gain the interior of the island.

To the fortress Paoli first turned his attention. Being

erected upon a mount, projecting over the waters of the inner haven, it covered its entire summit, which consisted of a considerable level space. The fortress was a quadrangular edifice of great strength, flanked by low massive towers. On the broad ramparts Paoli could distinctly see (for it was not more than a mile distant) many persons moving about and armed. The sun's rays flashed, at times, upon mail and steel. The only entrance to the garrison was up an exceedingly narrow path, partly steps cut in the rock, and at the ponderous gateway this path was divided by a deep fissure or ravine in the rocks, above sixty feet deep, and only to be crossed by the drawbridge being lowered from the fortress.

Paoli scanned its defences with a keen and anxious eye, as well as the distance would permit, and he felt satisfied that his former conjectures were right; for the fortress, if well provisioned and defended by resolute soldiers, might defy, for many months, ten times their own number.

"That is a strong place, Giacinto," said the count, following the direction of his cousin's eyes; "and if we have to attack it openly, will take us time, and cost us many a brave fellow. How the deuce did it happen that the islanders kept such a careless watch and guard as to be surprised by a mere handful of men? Antonio now confesses that the Genoese were not more than eighty, if so many; and the town then contained upwards of six hundred men, able and willing to fight.

"Yes," returned Paoli, "willing to fight when the fortress was won, and when they were convinced that the invaders were not devils, or men led on by sorcerers. But it was too late then; for fifty men once in possession of yonder bridge and gate could keep it against a thousand for a few days; and it seems, by all I have learned, that in three days this Achilles Furiani brought from Genoa a force of five hundred men, who were landed under the walls of the fortress. We must now see what we can do by stratagem. If we can once get footing on the other side of the bridge with our fifty men, let this crafty Genoese look to his garrison to save him. I owe him too much not to be anxious to clear scores with him. The gate once ours, there are, Antonio tells me, still a couple of hundred of hearty men ready to fight for the rescue of their chief. Now let us on; for, perhaps, your friend of last night may be so heated by his love for this fair niece of the Podesta as to hurry here before us."

"Except that I am safe, as far as my heart is concerned," said Otho, laughing, "I might think of robbing him of his blue-eyed Annette; for all the girls of this island, I am told, have blue eyes."

"Well," returned Paoli, "I can answer for one in it now not possessing the national colour. Her mother was one of the dark-eyed daughters of Venice."

"By Jove, I long to see this betrothed of yours, Giacinto," interposed Otho. "But here we are at the gate of the Signor Buttaficcio's mansion, or rather garden. How are we to get in? By the look of the garden, it is a long way to the house."

"I saw the signor's niece, at least I think so," observed Antonio, "come into the garden just as we left the hill. I was waiting behind purposely to see if any one came out of the house."

"Knock, then," said Paoli. "If we receive no answer, we must even take the liberty of going over the wall."

Pulini, who was very anxious to get in, fearing the passing of anybody, knocked and knocked hard. Presently, a voice from the other side—a female voice cried out, "*Amico, amico*, not so hard. You will either deafen me or break our door—two bad things these bad times; for if you make me deaf I shall not hear my lover; and if you break our door you will let in those horrid Genoese."

With the last word the door fell back, and an extremely pretty and laughing damsel, with blue eyes and a profusion of auburn ringlets, hanging somewhat negligently, perhaps coquettishly, from beneath a small Tuscan straw hat, appeared.

"Eh! Who have we here?" exclaimed she, starting back. But, catching a glimpse of old Antonio, who stood nearest the door, she continued,—"The saints preserve us! Is that you, or your ghost, Antonio? Where—"

But as her glance fell upon the stately and remarkable figure of Paoli, and her eyes met his, she involuntarily stopped and drew back.

"Pardon our rough intrusion, fair maiden," said Paoli, stepping within the garden. "No doubt, this is an unusual entrance to your domicile. But we must see your good uncle, and at once."

"Ha!" muttered the maiden to herself, "a very nice-spoken man, and the tallest and handsomest I ever saw." Then speaking out, she said,—"My uncle is coming up the garden, signor." She pronounced the last word with a very marked emphasis, and a rapid glance at Paoli's hand. The Signor Buttaficcio, with his other niece, now hurried up, seeing so many strangers in his garden.

Paoli advanced to meet him, while Sampiero, notwithstanding his confession that his heart was already engaged, stopped to converse with the pretty Annette, who seemed vastly puzzled

about the strangers, who were so grand in their air and manner, and yet so plainly habited—

Paoli whispered a few words in the ear of the Signor Buttaficcio which made him start, while his face flushed with excitement. His nieces were watching with eager curiosity ; but Paoli made a sign to Sampiero, and immediately the whole party hurried into the house, leaving the two girls gazing at each other with astonishment.

“Well,” exclaimed Annette to her sister Julia, “here is something, at last, to set our wits to work. Don’t let them think to deceive me with their attire and rough mantles. Did you observe that stately and majestic man, a whole head above the other handsome signor ? Did you remark his hand ? He had a most splendid diamond ring on one finger ; not a very well assorted article to the habit he had on. Then, did you see the start my uncle made, and how he pulled off his cap, and bowed low, and then looked up at us quite confused ? Ah, Julia, here is some secret we must find out.”

“But *how*, Annette, *how* ?” eagerly questioned Julia.

“Oh dear, how dull you are, Julia,” responded Annette. “They are gone into a private chamber. Thank goodness, all our doors have very large keyholes ; so come along. I am dying to know who these signors are.”

And immediately the two maidens hurried into the house.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE CONFERENCE.

UTTERLY confounded, bewildered, and eager to learn what to him appeared to be a stupendous mystery, the ex-podesta conducted the whole party into a commodious chamber, carefully closing the door. Whether the worthy Signor Buttaficcio distrusted his nieces or the old housekeeper (the only domestic he retained), he very carefully adjusted the key in the key-hole so as to fill the orifice. He then repeatedly shook our hero by the hand, asked a hundred questions at once, when, being very short-necked and extremely fat, he stopped for breath.

“As to how we got into the island, Signor Buttaficcio,” began Paoli, “must be kept for another time. I have several important questions to ask you. First, supposing I succeed in gaining the entrance to the fortress, are the men of the island willing to lend a helping-hand against the invaders ?”

“Willing, Signor Paoli !” eagerly replied the ex-podesta, “they are burning to revenge the outrages daily practised

against us. But we have no arms : there is not a sword, or a pick, or a dagger in the whole town !”

“I will remedy that, signor,” responded Paoli. “Now for my next question. Will the procession to the relics in the fortress chapel be permitted to take place on St. John’s day ?”

“Blessed Virgin !” exclaimed the old man, “how fortunate !” And he rubbed his hands in an ecstasy. “Without a thought, signor, of anything of this kind, I obtained that very permission from the Genoese commander, on the promise of paying a certain sum he has demanded, and which I am to take him this very day.”

“That is fortunate indeed,” exclaimed Paoli ; “for on that procession I build my hopes of surprising the guard at the bridge and gate.”

“I see it all now,” interrupted the ex-podesta, in a state of high excitement. “If we had but the weapons, and a few trained men-at-arms to—”

“Be easy on that score,” interposed Paoli. “We have both. When did you see the Marchese Damari and his daughter ? I trust they are well.”

“Well in health, Signor Paoli, but wretched in mind. This *maladetta* Campaldino threatens to force the Lady Agnes to the altar the day after St. John’s.”

“Ha !” muttered Paoli. “The day *AFTER* ! Campaldino will find we have an account to settle *before* that. Now Signor Buttaficcio, a very important question yet remains, and then I will let you clearly into my plans for St. John’s day. Suppose I contrive to get fifty men here to-morrow night with arms for a hundred more, where are they to remain till the time for action ? It will be but for a few hours. Still—”

“That is easily provided for,” interrupted the ex-podesta. “I have a long range of warehouses adjoining this house where we salt our stock of fish, and where they will be perfectly safe from either being seen or heard.”

“You said, Signor Buttaficcio, that this was the day you are permitted to visit the Marchese and his daughter.” Then, taking from his finger the splendid ring remarked by the ex-podesta’s niece, and which was a gift from Agnes, he handed it to the Caprese, saying—“Present that ring to the Lady Agnes ; and, if you can, whisper to her that the owner is near ; and, with God’s blessing, will be within the walls that hold her prisoner before the sun of St. John’s eve sets. Should you not be allowed to see the Lady Agnes without witnesses, contrive, nevertheless, to let her see that ring, the motto of which is, *ESPERANZA*. She will understand it well.”

“I may not see them alone, signor,” said the Caprese ; “but,

depend on it, I will contrive she shall see the ring, and in a manner that the Lady Agnes may not betray herself or me by sudden emotion or confusion of manner."

Paoli then clearly explained how he intended proceeding on St. John's day. The podesta was in ecstacy ; he was a most inveterate hater of the Genoese, and an ardent lover of liberty. Besides, he owed them a grudge for depriving him of his title of podesta, of which he was exceedingly proud.

Having acquainted the Caprese with their renconter with Achilles Furiani, and put him upon his guard, Paoli thought it best to return at once to the caverns. The ex-podesta wished them to remain till night, for fear of attracting observation ; but all the party were of opinion they incurred less risk in returning the way they came ; for the entrance to the caves was in so remote and obscure a spot, and so hidden by projecting rocks and thick underwood, that no danger of being seen would occur ; and, perhaps, during the absence of Signor Buttaficcio at the fortress, some visitor or unforeseen event might create observation.

Accordingly, after partaking of some refreshment and drinking a flask of wine to the success of their expedition, Paoli and his friend and attendants departed for the caverns.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE GOVERNOR AND THE EX-PODESTA.

"Now, dear uncle," said Annette to the ex-podesta, as she assisted the old gentleman to fill two tolerably large bags with various coins, the amount of the sum levied by Campaldino—"now do tell me—for I am dying to know—who is that magnificent stranger, and the very handsome man with him ? I must know—that's positive."

"Why, child, I tell you they are merchants from Piombino, come to buy up the stock-fish and salt cod on speculation."

The two girls burst into a hearty giggle. Annette laughed till the tears ran from her eyes.

"Merchants of stock-fish, indeed !" ejaculated she, patting the old man on the cheek ; "oh, my dear, good uncle, you may deceive those abominable Genoese, but you can't blind your two little nieces. Do merchants of stock-fish wear diamond rings, worth I can't say how much ? Do merchants of stock-fish make presents of diamond rings ? for I see the same ring, uncle, on your finger, though you are doing your best to hide it. And do fish merchants carry swords under their mantles in a place where swords are forbidden ? And, as sure as I live, I saw, as he went in at the door, and the nail caught his vest—"

"Well, you inquisitive little vixen," said the uncle, smiling, and tying up his sacks, "what did you see?"

"I saw a beautiful cuirass of chain-mail, like that of the crusader in the fortress, on the breast of the tall signor. So confess at once—out with it all—" and the maiden shook her finger playfully, "or I will tell that huge giant of a Genoese, Achilles Furiani."

"I will lock you up in your room this instant if—but no," added the ex-podesta, "I may as well make a clean breast of it, for they must know it to-morrow; and, after all, the dear children would willingly risk their lives to serve the Lady Agnes."

So the old gentleman sat down, and made his two nieces acquainted with all.

Annette clasped her hands—blushed—then grew pale; and, finally, sprang upon her feet, and kissed her sister Julia several times, saying,

"Oh, how delightful! We shall get rid of those horrid Genoese. My beloved Lady Agnes will be free, and then she will marry that glorious Signor Paoli. We shall have a splendid wedding-fête. The whole island shall be a blaze of bonfires—and I—"

"There, for the love of the saints, stop," interposed her uncle. "Get me my hat. I have plenty for you to do besides talking. All the stock-fish, &c., must be taken into the small store; and you must do it yourselves. At this moment, there is, luckily, not much. Then you two and old Bridgetta must bake cakes without end, and roast those two kids, and prepare all the provisions the house contains. Let no one either see or hear you. Keep out all visitors till my return. And now I am off."

On entering the fortress, the Signor Buttaficcio was admitted into the presence of the governor, who turned his keen eye upon the worthy and somewhat excited Caprese. A satisfied expression stole over Campaldino's features, as he perceived his visitor lay upon the table two heavy bags.

"I see you are punctual, my worthy friend," said the governor, desiring the ex-podesta to take a seat. "The tribute-money, I suppose?"

"Yes, your eccellenza; I have contrived to make it up—though the saints are witness it has cost me much to wring even the half out of my poor countrymen."

"The old story—always the same song," returned Campaldino, laughing. "I dare say now, if I absolutely wanted as much more—don't be alarmed, for I may not want it."

"Where is it to come from?" interrogated the ex-podesta,

feigning to be dreadfully alarmed. "We have no gold mines, or even iron ones, here, your eccellenza."

"Look you, my good friend," interrupted the Genoese, "the fitting-out of the expedition to take this beggarly little island —don't be offended, signor—I see you don't like the name. It's not pleasant; therefore, you see I do all I can to convince myself that I am wrong to think so. But, as I was saying, the costs of the expedition have not been defrayed by—what shall I say?—by the plunder. Therefore, I am now thinking of selling my rights in the conquest to the government, who will, of course, send a new governor and a much larger force. The new governor will expect a handsome—a very handsome present. Now, I feel for you, as I am actually getting fond of—"

"I see," resumed Campaldino, "that word sticks in your throat, my good friend; but I have a way of getting you out of this dilemma. You have heard that I have offered myself to the Marchese's daughter, and have been refused. The maiden pleads a former attachment. That's all very well; but, under the existing state of things, she must make up her mind to a different determination. I gave the lady till St. John's day to consider of my proposals. If then she is unwilling, I must (though I greatly regret it) use the power in my hands, and force her to unite her destiny to mine. Now, this morning, I have received intelligence from Genoa that forces me to alter those resolutions. She must, therefore, now at once give me her solemn promise to go willingly to the altar immediately after the ceremony of St. John's day. She—as my wife—and her father will sail with me, for I intend quitting the island that very night. The next day the new governor will arrive. Why, Signor Buttaficcio, you look alarmed. But there is no need. An ancient feud continues between me and the new governor. I shall sail, but my lieutenant, Furiani, will retain the command of the fortress till the arrival of my successor. Go, now, and see the maiden, for she refuses to see me. If she gives me her sacred word to go willingly to the altar on St. John's day, I will wait till then; if she still persists in an obstinate refusal, by——" (and the Genoese raised his voice, and his one eye flashed) "by the bones of St. John, and all the sacred relics contained in your chapel, she shall stand this blessed day at the altar, and never quit the spot till the priest makes her mine. Now, do you understand me, Signor Buttaficcio?"

The spirit of the old Caprese was nearly betraying him at this audacious menace from a miserable adventurer to a daughter of the ancient and noble race of the Damari but

curbing his feelings, he bowed humbly, saying, "You know, your excellenza, I can but use persuasion. She is our lord's daughter, and I can only humbly entreat her to do that willingly which she has no power to resist."

"That is all I require of you, Signor Buttaficcio," returned Campaldino. "She has refused to admit me to her presence. I do not wish to use force, if I can obtain my end quietly. But my purpose I *will* gain, be it as it may; for alive she shall never quit this fortress, except as the bride of Andrea Campaldino. I shall await your return here. You know the way to the marchese's apartments."

With a very heavy heart, the Caprese, bowing, left the chamber. As he did so, who should he meet in the corridor but the lieutenant, Achilles Furiani.

"Ha! Signor Buttaficcio," exclaimed that worthy, "is this you? Delighted to see you looking so well;" and, holding out his huge hand, he gave the unfortunate podesta that was a shake which turned his already red face to a purple hue. "How is your charming niece, Annette?" continued he. "My heart is parched to a cinder. She consumes me. But stay—don't be in a hurry. Who is that good-looking fellow that resides with you? I am told he is an artist. Droll place this—now I think of it, eh?—for an artist."

"Nothing droll, worthy Signor Furiani, in a nephew coming from Rome, where he is studying, to see his old uncle. But, Signor Achilles, I am bearing a most important message from your commander to the marchese—so excuse me."

"Oh! nephew, eh?—may be," muttered the Genoese. "By all the saints, I must have that girl for a wife, and get out of this cramped island, where, by Jove, there is no room for a man to stretch his limbs!"

Leaving Furiani to seek his commander, the Signor Buttaficcio proceeded to the apartments assigned to the marchese.

The ex-podesta found the Marchese Damari alone, reclining dejectedly in a large chair, and gazing out through the open lattice upon the broad expanse of water surrounding his native island.

"Ah, my worthy friend, is it you?" said the marchese, extending his hand, with a very sad smile. "This boon of seeing our old and valued friend deserves the warm thanks of my heart; for, amid the deep affliction in which we are plunged, I was eagerly wishing for your arrival. I have one chance more to save my child from death—for her death it will be, if dragged to the altar by that detestable adventurer."

"Be of good cheer, my lord," responded the Caprese, pressing

affectionately the hand held out to him. Then, bending down his head, he whispered, "Your deliverance is nearer at hand, thank Heaven, than you imagine."

"Ha! What mean you, my worthy friend? Do not raise hopes the more cruel when crushed."

At that moment the lady Agnes, hearing the raised voice of her father, and his somewhat excited tone, entered the room.

"Ah! my dear young lady," exclaimed the ex-podesta, taking the hand held out to him, "you have been weeping. But I trust the tidings I bring will chase away the tears, and restore the roses to your cheek."

Letting go the hand of the young lady, he went to the door, looked carefully without, closed it, and then, taking Paoli's ring from his vest, he held it forth to the maiden. With clasped hands, and, at the first sight, pale as monumental marble, stood Agnes, gazing upon the ring. Then once more the bright blood flew over face and temples, and the words, "Paoli! *Esperanza!*!" burst from her lips. Wild with delight, she threw herself upon the neck of her astonished father, saying, "Father, beloved father, my heart tells me we are saved; for Paoli, my beloved, is here. This is his token." She took the ring from the delighted Caprese. "From none other than himself did our kind friend here receive it. Is it not so, Signor Buttaficcio?"

"Happy am I, dear lady, to say such is the fact. But listen to me, for time runs on, and I have to state startling things. We must bring ourselves to use deceit, or at least dissemble with our tyrant."

The Signor Buttaficcio then distinctly stated all the plans of Paoli; and subsequently delivered the message of Campaldino.

At first the maiden grew pale and trembled, while the proud blood of the crusader, for a moment, was roused in the patient and gentle nature of the marchese.

"What!" he exclaimed, "my child—the last of the Damaris—give her sacred promise to stand at the altar with this Genoese bloodhound? Let us perish in each other's arms first; for the word of a Damari, even to such as he, once passed, must be fulfilled; and should our deliverer, by some unforeseen accident, fail on that day, my child——"

"Nay, beloved father, I have no fear, none," responded Agnes. "I will accede to this man's terms. Heaven is on our side. At all events, it is a case that has no remedy; for this bad man would assuredly drag me to the altar this night."

"I do not deny, my beloved child," said the marchese, "but that you are right. Misfortune has somewhat broken my temper. We will, therefore, act as you say; and if it is the will of God that Paoli should for a time fail in taking this fortress, I have a remedy which I think may even then avert your fate. Campaldino's idol is gold. Surely the great wealth I possess in Florence and Pisa—if I offer him the whole—will induce him to resign his designs upon you—"

"Nay, father," replied Agnes, "not so. Campaldino seeks revenge,—a greater passion than even that of gold."

The marchese sighed; and, after some further remarks, the Signor Buttaficcio left them. Agnes, full of hope; her father, with feelings dulled from age, resigned, but fearful of the future.

While the ex-podesta was communicating with the father and daughter, Achilles Furiani entered the chamber where the governor awaited the return of the Signor Buttaficcio.

"I come to hear the news, governor," said Furiani, seating himself carelessly opposite his commander, and looking extremely well pleased at his enormous limbs as he threw one over the other. "I have also to give you a bit of information."

"Well, out with your information, whatever it is," replied the governor; "for I rather suspect we have had quite enough of our conquest."

"Ha, by St. Jacomo, you are right!" returned Achilles. "This place is too confined for men of our genius. I am, moreover, of opinion, if we do not get out of it quietly, we shall have to depart rather hastily, if not be carried out on a stretcher."

"*Cento diavoli!*" said Campaldino; "what makes you think that, Achilles? No one has heard the intelligence I received this morning.

"Well, you shall hear. I was up very early, or rather went to bed very early, this morning; and it being a glorious sunrise, and feeling rather heated, I went to take a little fresh air from the top of the tower, when, just standing out from under the land, I beheld a very fine zebec at some distance off. I also observed a large galley. A fine tramontana was blowing, and in a few minutes I saw the zebec run alongside the galley, which was crowded with armed men. I thought, at first, it might be the galley with the troops you sent for to Genoa; but, as she came nearer, I saw at once she was not a Genoese craft by her build. The zebec remained near her for a few minutes, when both tacked and stood away; one to the

southward, the other to the westward, reducing their canvas, though the wind was light enough to carry every stitch they could set. I was too sleepy to think much about it then ; but now I have had my nap, on turning the matter over, it's cursedly suspicious."

"It's nothing more than I expected," said Campaldino, very coolly ; "only they are very expeditious."

Furiani fixed his large dark eye on the one orb of his commander, and then whistled.

"Now," resumed Campaldino, "I will tell you, not only my news, but how we must act. I have received intelligence, this morning, by those Elba fishermen whom I employed as spies at Bastia, that not only has my enemy Paoli returned, but that a galley, with six hundred men, was to be shortly fitted out for an expedition against this fortress. You are aware that I sent to Genoa for a stronger garrison ; for, should Corsica recover her liberty, we might depend upon being attacked. But this very morning our craft returned, bringing me letters. There is nothing but mourning and dismay in Genoa. Their fleet has been scattered and destroyed by the Venetians—the French have declared war against the Republic ; and they are expecting a French fleet. Moreover, the lord of Milan has laid claim to some disputed territory ; and, as a climax to our misfortunes, a popular tumult amongst the silk-spinners, backed by the powerful family of the Spinola, has led to a change of Doge. I am desired to evacuate this island, and return with the men garrisoning the fortress to Spezia, and join my force to that of the Count Brignoletti, who is besieging Sarzana, the worthy count of that name having declared that his town's people and territory owe no obedience to the Republic."

"*Corpo di Bacco !*" exclaimed Achilles, rubbing his huge head as usual, "you bother me when you come to politics. I know nothing whatever of any of the parties you have been jumbling together this last half-hour ; nor do I desire to understand anything about them. I want simply to know when you marry this marchese's daughter. What's to be done next ? For I intend following so good an example ; and if pretty Annette will not have me for a husband, she must even follow my fortunes without that clog round her neck."

Campaldino stared at his lieutenant, and then, shrugging his shoulders, said,—

"Listen ! To-morrow this ceremony to the relics will take place. As soon as the procession enters the fortress, we shall up with the bridge and keep them prisoners till we are ready

to leave. March your twenty men here to-night, as soon as dark. After my marriage—for I will marry this girl, or my revenge is lost—I shall embark the men under the command of Gavotti, with orders to proceed to Genoa, while you and I, and our wives, will sail in the galley for Pisa; and, sharing the fortune of my bride between us, live quietly anywhere on the continent of Italy. I am sick of this wild, roving, and uncertain life which we have led for so many years."

"Give me your hand, Andrea. Your plan is a splendid one. *Corpo di Juda!* What a pleasant life we shall lead, taking care of our wives, nursing our young ones, and exchanging our swords for ploughshares!"

Campaldino burst into a fit of laughter.

"What a nurse you will make, Achilles! But a truce to joking. We must look out sharp. If that galley should be a Corsican one, full of men, and enter our harbour to-morrow, adieu to our projects of escaping to Italy. My revenge against Paoli I shall have at all events. In such case, we must make our escape from the island through the caverns. I trust the two boats are safe?"

"No fear of them," said Achilles, "for they are hauled high up into an inner cavern, and almost impossible to be hurt by anything except an earthquake."

CHAPTER XLVII.

NARRATIVE OF OTHO SAMPIERO.

PAOLI and his party reached the caverns without observation, and found their men quietly enjoying their mid-day repast beside the fires. Luca Manifesto and his nephew, while exploring the caverns, discovered the two boats, each capable of containing thirty men, drawn high up in a cave, on the other side of the rock, and covered over carefully with tarred canvas. There were oars, masts, sails, &c.

"I have no doubt," said Paoli, "they keep these boats, in case of extremity, as a means of escape. As we know not what might occur, the best way would be to knock out a plank in each."

This was accordingly done.

"By the by, Otho," said our hero, to his cousin, as they reclined on their mantles before the fire, after having finally arranged all matters relative to their expedition, "the evening is long. We shall not move till after midnight, so as to give the men a few hours' sleep. I have not heard your adventures after our parting. Your not joining me in Venice caused me

much uncasiness and anxiety. Let me know how you passed your time till we were again united before the walls of La Rocca."

"I will do so, cousin mine, willingly, though one part of my narrative will recall a melancholy event, and some bitter recollections of one who merited a far different fate.

"After the death of Mastino Campaldino, you know we agreed to separate, and, as nothing further could be done in the cause of our suffering country, to escape to the continent. I first proceeded to La Rocca, and just contrived to secure some jewels, money, and plate before a strong party, under a Genoese captain, took possession of the place. Disguised as peasants, young Gaffieri and I, with six others, made our way, with difficulty, to Orto ; and, in the darkness of a tempestuous night, got on board a large fishing-boat moored to the quay, and, cutting her from her fastenings, we drifted, with the gale from the land out to sea. Rejoicing at our escape, (for we had been hotly pursued from La Rocca) we paid little attention to the gale, as, the wind being off shore, the water remained tolerably smooth for three or four miles. But as we rapidly increased our distance, the sea became uncommonly rough ; and, to steady the boat, we were forced to hoist a small portion of sail. I was the only one of the party that had any knowledge of nautical matters ; and all I knew was how to steer, and, if necessary, pull an oar.

"We drove before the gale for about three leagues in tolerable comfort ; but it increased tremendously. The night was dark enough ; but as the gale increased in fury, a dense fog came with it. I was perfectly aware that, with the wind as it then blew, provided we could keep the boat free, we should make the Italian coast easily the next day. The fog was so dense that we could not see the length of ourselves ahead, and the boat was nearly full, notwithstanding our strenuous efforts to keep her free of the seas that broke over her, when one of the men in the bow called out in a voice of terror, 'A vessel coming right down on us !' The fact was we were driving right into her, as she was crossing our course. The next instant we struck with tremendous force.

"Our boat was dashed to pieces ; but, singular enough, excepting one poor fellow, we all contrived to lay hold of something, and scrambled on board the strange barque, and, but for some bruises and blows, we were safe and sound, returning thanks to Providence for our most unlooked-for preservation.

"The crew of the caravel were, at first, more frightened

than ourselves, and fled below, thinking they were boarded by *ladri-di-mare*, by which cowardice we were all nearly swamped, for the barque was deeply laden, and her helm neglected. She ran up in the wind, and then her close-reefed sail blew out into strings, and she shipped a sea that caused her to tremble from stem to stern, and to leave us in doubt whether she was not inclined to follow our unfortunate boat. We soon, however, re-assured the startled padrone and his crew ; and, after some little exertion, the vessel was got to rights, and another sail hoisted. The caravel was a Livornese, bound to Cagliari, in Sardinia, which she was not just then destined to make ; for, so violent became the storm, that, during the night, she was forced to run before it. At last she was driven to take shelter in the mouth of the Tiber, and cast anchor at Ostia.

“ However unfortunate this was to the interests of the padrone, it was the very thing that suited Gaffieri and myself, as we both wished to proceed to Rome. We sincerely trusted that you had succeeded in making the Italian coast. Having landed at Ostia, we proceeded at once to Rome. Gaffieri’s sister had married, some years before, a Corsican signor, who, previously to the breaking out of the war, had sold his possessions, and settled in Rome, where many of our exiled countrymen resided.

“ I proceeded at once to my uncle Alberic, Count d’Orsini, who received me with parental kindness, and took up my abode at his palace till I had made up my mind what to do. I found that my uncle’s family were engaged in a furious contest of rivalry with the proud and powerful house of the Colonna. Rome had returned to its old state of anarchy and confusion, after the banishment of that mad enthusiast, Cola Rienzi, when suddenly, to the astonishment to all, Rienzi re-entered Rome, actually appointed by Innocent the Sixth to govern the city, under the title of senator. The fickle Romans welcomed his return with boisterous joy, forgetting, in their love of change, that but a short time had elapsed since they drove him from their city, with imprecations on his head. But it is ever thus with the people. Nevertheless, his popularity, in a very short time, began to decline. Misfortune had by no means improved the disposition of the tribune. His former enthusiasm was exchanged for suspicion and cruelty. But I leave Rienzi and his motives to our historians. I have little to say of *him*, but of one connected with him by ties of blood.

“ On his return to Rome, Rienzi was accompanied by his niece, who was famed throughout Italy for her extraordinary

beauty, her wonderful eloquence, her marvellous talent as an improvisatrice, and her enthusiastic love of freedom. Her addresses to the people of every town through which Rienzi passed in his wanderings were the wonder and delight of all ; and, in more than one city, her eloquence induced the people to rise and throw off their yoke of slavery. So powerful was said to be the effect of her language upon the lower classes, that many of the princes of the small Italian states closed their gates against her entrance.

“Berenice Rienzi—such was the name of the beautiful, but unfortunate, improvisatrice—accompanied, as I said, her uncle to Rome, and took up her residence in a noble mansion, where, in a very short time, she attracted, by her splendid assemblies, her brilliant wit, and superb beauty, all that was noble and wealthy in Rome. Many of the young nobility became desperately enamoured of her beauty ; but the most conspicuous, from his birth, talents, and power, was Ercole Colonna, accounted the haughtiest and proudest of all the Roman nobility, and the determined rival of Alberic Orsini.

“One evening I accompanied Orsini’s nephew, a young man of my own age, to one of those splendid fêtes given by Berenice Rienzi. The saloons were crowded with all the nobility, male and female, in Rome. A man must, in truth, have had a most insensible heart, to move amid that scene of luxury and beauty and remain unmoved. The splendid decorations of the apartments—the chaste and graceful taste with which everything was arranged—attracted, without dazzling, the eye. But when once the gaze rested on Berenice, the beauty of everything, animate and inanimate, faded.

“The improvisatrice was sitting on a raised platform, surrounded, as usual, by her train of admirers and lovers. She held a lute in her hand, though, at that time, she used it not. She was in one of her inspired moods. I could see by the flash of her dark eyes, the rapid changes of colour that went and came upon the full and beautiful cheek, and the graceful motion of one hand, that she was speaking ; though, as I stood at a little distance, the words did not reach my ear. But when I did hear her voice (for I contrived to get much nearer through the dense crowd) every word went to the heart. When she ceased, a murmur of delight and enthusiastic admiration burst from the throng around her. She then rose and walked through the saloons, leaning on the arm of the haughty Colonna.

“If every feature of Berenice’s face was perfection, the beauty and grandeur of her form was unequalled. She was

above the usual standard of her sex: every movement of her full and rounded figure excited admiration from the unstudied grace that accompanied it. After being introduced to this siren, I became, like the rest of her followers, perfectly fascinated. I bowed at the shrine; and, whether my youthful vanity blinded me or not, I fancied that, except when Ercole Colonna was present, Berenice bestowed most of her attention upon me.

“A superb fête was given by Berenice. The company was to descend the Tiber, towards Ostia, in splendidly decorated galleys, or rather barges, to examine the ruins of temples and other buildings lying on its banks—remnants of the gigantic puissance of the ancient Romans. The barges were to be drawn back by oxen. Though the party was a select one, the haughty Colonna, from some caprice, declined to join it. There was, however, one cavalero for each dame. It was a bright and glorious morning. The heat of the autumnal sun was tempered by a gentle west wind, and bright masses of grey, fleecy clouds sailed slowly across the sun, and threw many fanciful shadows over the scenery, and on the muddy waters of the rapidly-gliding Tiber. The party occupied a raised platform in the stern of the galley, protected by a slight railing, decorated with flowers. We had a select band of musicians in the prow; and, as we glided past the city, and gained the open campagna, the band broke the stillness by their enlivening strains. We were carried along solely by the waters of this turbulent and somewhat dangerous stream. After passing the famous temple of Vesta, the river bends away to the northward, with increased rapidity. We had skilful pilots, and, heedless of the risk of the voyage, listened to the inspired eloquence of the goddess of the fête as she descended upon the glories of ancient Rome, and of that idol of the human race, Liberty.

“The oxen, decorated with garlands, were yoked to the barge in order to return. As we slowly ascended, I was in earnest conversation with Berenice. The subject of our talk was Corsica,—the love of the people for freedom, and their hatred of a foreign yoke. Berenice was better acquainted with our annals even than myself. She traced our history back to the earlier times, when Cadmus, the son of Agenor, wandering in quest of Europa, came to our island, which was then named Calista. He left there many of his countrymen, with his own cousin Membleareus. ‘Eight generations after this,’ Berenice continued, quite enthusiastic in her theme, ‘Theros brought a colony to Corsica from Lacedemon.

“ ‘This Theros, who was originally of the race of Cadmus, carried with him to Corsica the Minyæ—a wandering tribe—and formed there a new colony. From him the island was called Thera.

“ ‘The Minyæ, though a wandering tribe, were of illustrious descent, being the posterity of the Argonauts.’ Thus did Berenice account for the first peopling of Corsica ; but the way that Isidorus accounts for the name of Corsica is most amusing. He declares that a Ligurian woman of the name of Corsa, having often observed a bull swim over to the island,* had the curiosity to follow him in a small vessel, and so discovered where he went. Relating, on her return, this marvellous swim of her bull, the Ligurians sent there a colony, and called the island Corsica. Its next masters, she said, were the Carthaginians. From them the island passed under the dominion of Rome. Lucius Cornelius Scipio conquered Corsica about the period of the first Punic war, and forced the natives to pay a tribute of one hundred thousand pounds of wax yearly.

“ Berenice had just brought our history down to the period from whence we ourselves take it up, and was descanting on the cruelties practised upon us by nearly all our conquerors, when a sudden and violent shock was felt on board the barge. A wild shriek followed. The tow-rope had snapped, and the barge coming broadside to a violent rush of the current round a point, caused her to heel suddenly on her side. Berenice, another signora, and Signor Giulia (a learned antiquarian) were thrown against the rail, which broke, and, in an instant, the three were plunged into the river. Being a good swimmer, I threw off my vest and sword, plunged in, and instantly caught the sinking Berenice in my grasp. She was perfectly sensible and tractable ; and I swam down the stream till I had an opportunity of landing, with my precious burden, on a low point. As soon as she recovered breath, I assisted her a little way up the bank ; where, being exhausted, she reposed herself till the barge, which had been driven on the bank by the current, could make its way to us. Berenice expressed the deepest anxiety concerning the fate of the young Countess de Manfridi and the Signor Giulia. I proceeded along the bank some way, hoping, if the unfortunates had been carried down the stream, I might yet afford assistance. But no trace was to be seen of them ; and the barge was rowed to the spot where Berenice sat.

“ When I returned, a sad gloom hung over the before gay

* A tolerable swim—that of nearly a hundred miles.

party ; so like everything else in human life—rising in smiles, setting in tears. The countess was providentially saved by one of the cavaleros, but the ill-fated antiquarian perished ; nor was his body ever recovered—washed, I suppose, into the Mediterranean. It was a mournful return to the eternal city. After seeing the Lady Berenice to her palace, in a covered litter, I returned, immersed in somewhat melancholy reflections, to the Orsini mansion.

“ If Rienzi’s niece was dangerous to me before, you will allow that my situation was now tenfold more trying. I had saved her life ; had rescued her from an ignoble death ; and yet, though fascinated, dazzled, bewildered—strange waywardness of the human heart—I was not prepared to cast myself and fortunes at the feet of the improvisatrice. We met. I know not why I should be so forgetful ; but I remember neither what I said nor what she replied. On a sudden, the door of the saloon was thrown open. I was at the feet of Berenice and held her hand. At the door stood Ercole Colonna ! He spoke not a word, but stood like a statue, with his face pale as marble, and his lips quivering with intense passion. Berenice, uttering a faint exclamation, became even paler than the Colonna. She rose, and, pressing her hand to her lofty brow, hurried from the saloon through another door without uttering a word. Colonna, with a laugh that startled me, turned on his heel and retired.

“ I stood confused and perplexed. I knew not what to infer from the conduct either of Berenice or Colonna. ‘ What tie exists between them ? ’ I asked myself, as I slowly and thoughtfully left the palace. The streets were thronged with an excited populace ; but I heeded neither their cries nor tumult, but pushed my way through the multitude, scarcely caring which way I went, so as I cleared myself from the presence of my fellow-men. Reaching the Colosseum, I plunged amid its solitude to be alone with thought. The cool air that rushed through the vaulted passages by degrees calmed the fever of my blood ; and as I crossed what was once the arena of many a bloody spectacle, I beheld the Count Colonna advancing towards me. I did not turn away, and the next instant we stood face to face. The count was still deadly pale, but there remained no visible trace of passion upon his severe but extremely handsome features.

“ ‘ I have followed you here, Count Sampiero,’ said the Colonna, speaking calmly and emphatically. ‘ And may I inquire, count,’ I said with equal coolness, ‘ for what purpose you have been pleased to dog my footsteps ? ’ ‘ Simply,’ returned the

Roman, 'to make this proposition : either that you quit this city, or take your chance of sleeping beneath the marbles of San Pietro.' 'You are generous, count,' I replied, with a somewhat bitter smile. 'Quit this city at any man's bidding I will not ; neither do I relish, at this moment, sleeping, as you term it, beneath even the superb marbles of your glorious San Pietro.' 'You are somewhat dull, count, in taking my meaning,' retorted the Roman ; 'but I will speak more plainly. The Colonna brooks no rival in the affections of Rienzi's niece. Two cannot possess her, and, while I live and wear a sword, none shall dispute my claim.' 'If the lady has given you a claim, Sir Count, I have neither the right nor the wish to dispute her will or choice.' 'All this is idle, Sir Corsican,' returned Colonna, losing temper and speaking in a scornful tone. 'Draw !' And he himself drew his sword. 'One or other of us two must be carried from this spot.' 'I owe you no enmity, Count Colonna, and I regret that you force this foolish contest on me ; but I do not wish to trouble any one with the burden of my body, and will, therefore, keep life in it as long as possible.'

"Whether because he saw me undisturbed by passion, or some inward feeling urged him on, I cannot say ; but Colonna fought with an impetuosity that deprived him of his usual skill ; for, though I determined only to remain on my guard, and, if possible, disarm him, yet his strength and skill so baffled me that, heated myself—for I was hard pressed—I attacked in turn, and, in the end, though I bitterly regretted it, I stretched him, severely wounded, at my feet. Sheathing my unlucky weapon, I bent down, and, raising his head, strove to staunch the blood. Just then I heard quick steps behind me, and, raising my head, perceived four or five of the Colonna family hurrying to raise their lord. With scowling looks and threats of vengeance they raised the insensible Colonna, and, covering him with his mantle, they bore him from the Colosseum.

"In a frame of mind by no means to be envied, I left the place, and soon after became mingled in a dense crowd of the very lower orders of Rome. Shouts of 'Down with Rienzi ! Death to the tribune !' and many other popular cries, resounded on all sides. Bands of retainers, armed to the teeth, and having the badge of their various houses, joined the mob ; and presently, to my horror, I beheld Rienzi himself in the hands of a furious multitude, who were dragging him to execution. I thought of Berenice, who idolized her uncle. She had often declared she would never survive him if he fell in the cause of Liberty.

“I struggled with the crowd to get close to the once venerated champion of Roman liberty, when the mob suddenly paused before a noble palace, for a female voice, even in that fierce tumult, arrested them. I looked up and saw Berenice Rienzi standing on the balcony, as, with outstretched arms and excited features, she harangued the mob. The wonderful flow of impassioned words which fell from her inspired tongue had its usual effect; even the ruffians that held Rienzi fell back and hesitated. Profiting by their apparent indecision, Rienzi himself hastened to pour upon them his usual eloquence. There is scarcely a doubt that he would again have gained their hearts, when a gigantic ruffian, with his arms bare to the shoulder, pushed through those surrounding him, and with a knife stabbed the tribune to the heart. The next moment my sword was passed through the body of the wretch. A wild and piercing shriek rent the air. I was rushing forward—for Berenice frantically threw herself from the balcony—when I received from behind a tremendous blow of a mallet, which stretched me senseless on the ground.

“When consciousness returned, I perceived I was lying upon my own couch in the Orsini Palace. It was many days before I could ask the questions I longed, yet feared, to ask. A party of the Orsini retainers had seen me in the crowd, and rescued me when a huge smith had felled me with his hammer. Alas! the rest of the intelligence chilled my heart for many a day. The gifted, the noble Berenice was no more! Though caught by the people in her fall from the balcony, she afterwards broke a blood-vessel in her agony of grief; and, in less than twenty-four hours, uncle and niece were laid low.”

The Count Sampiero here paused for a few minutes, pained, no doubt, by the recollections of that period. Giacinto, after giving some directions to Pulini, roused his cousin, who resumed his narrative, which we shall continue in our next chapter.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SAMPIERO'S NARRATIVE CONTINUED.

“ROME,” continued the Count Sampiero, “after this incident became hateful to me. Ercole Colonna was recovering from the wound he had received; but I fear his heart suffered a greater in the death of the ill-fated improvisatrice.

“Gaffieri was gone to Naples, and I resolved, now that I was so sadly awakened from the dream that had bound my senses, to proceed to Venice and make inquiries after you. A tedious

and dangerous journey I had of it. I got no further than Pisa, when I gained intelligence that completely changed my intentions. I heard from a countryman of ours, who had been in Venice, that the Venetian fleet had sailed for the Eastern seas, and that you had the command of a galley in the expedition. There were also in Pisa several Corsicans who had recently fled the island, as the persecutions and exactions of the invaders had increased tenfold.

“To my astonishment, I learned that that traitor (not that I was aware he was so then) Antonetti—who, you know, was next heir to my estates in default of issue—had sworn allegiance to the Genoese Government, and handed over a third of my possessions to the Genoese governors as the fine. He then quietly sat down in my paternal castle of La Rocca, to enjoy at his ease my forfeited property. At the period of my escape from Corsica, Tomaso, the son of my old huntsman, Domenichino, accompanied me as my attendant, and a faithful, devoted follower he proved. As soon as he heard this intelligence, he said that he and his father always suspected that Antonetti was playing a double part; for that, during his absence with me in the mountains, the Signor Antonetti had visited La Rocca and Castle Ranuncio, and endeavoured, by bribery and other means, to discover where the family treasure was buried. Tomaso strongly advised our returning to Corsica in the disguise of sailors, that we might look after Antonetti, and, if necessary, remove the hidden property.

“I myself felt a wish to return. I had lost all chance of joining you by my long stay in Rome; and it required very little persuasion to induce me to adopt Tomaso’s plans. Being neither tall nor short, nor very remarkable in any way, I incurred very little risk. Disguised as a Pisan sailor, and having found the padrone of a small barque bound for Porto Vecchio, I took passage with him. I so far trusted him as to let him know we were Corsican exiles, anxious to return and live quietly under the Genoese Government; indeed I might, had it been necessary, have told him who I was, and that a price was set upon my head. There was no fear of him. The Pisans detest the Genoese, who have destroyed their commerce.

“We reached Porto Vecchio after a short run, and, landing without attracting any observation, we took the road across the country towards Monte Bavello. Avoiding the places garrisoned by Genoese, we reached, the third evening, a peasant’s hut on the borders of my own domain of La Rocca. The owner of the hut, who very cordially gave us the usual welcome, was a stranger to me, though not to Tomaso, who, however, kept

his features much concealed. The man—a fine, hardy, resolute-looking fellow, placed the best fare he possessed before us ; and, while eating, I asked a few questions about the state of the country. At first the peasant answered rather surly ; but, changing my tone, I spoke to him in the patois peculiar to our part of the island. He started, looked at me for a moment, and then answered with greater civility and less reserve,—

“ ‘ You are a Corsican, signor,’ said he. ‘ How came you and your companion so far from the coast, and in the garb of foreign sailors ? ’

“ I replied,—

“ ‘ We were glad to get employment under a Pisan padrone. We came thus far inland to inquire after relatives.’

“ ‘ You had little luck to come back here,’ replied the peasant. ‘ ‘ Tis only now that the cursed tyranny of our oppressors is really felt. We are ground to the earth.’

“ ‘ And is all the spirit of our countrymen gone ? ’ I replied. ‘ Is there not a spark left to kindle a flame that would consume these *maladetto* tyrants ? ’

“ ‘ Sparks enough, as you call them,’ returned the man, ‘ but who is to collect them ? There are no chiefs on the island who do not cringe to their masters ; ay, and grind us peasants to make up the tax levied upon them. If we murmur, they hunt us from our homes like dogs. If we fly to the mountains, those cursed adventurers drive us out with bloodhounds. Ah,’ continued the peasant bitterly, ‘ when will a Paoli, a Rivalora, and a Sampiero raise again the standard of Liberty ! Those were the chiefs that fought and bled for their country, and sold their lands, not to live in luxury on a foreign soil, but to help their people and save their native land.’

“ ‘ I suppose,’ I replied, taking an interest in the man, ‘ we are now on the lands of the Sampiero family, though they have passed, I judge, into other hands.’

“ ‘ Yes, you are now on the property of our young count—the saints preserve him wherever he is ! I have never seen him, for, during the last war, I fought under Rivalora. But the lands are now claimed by his traitorous cousin, the Signor Antonetti, who is employed with that cursed Genoese, Casa Bianca, the commander of Porto Vecchio, hunting the country round for the treasures said to be buried by the Sampieros ; but, by St. Antonio, he is well watched ! Old Domenichino is on their track. I am wrong, perhaps, in talking thus even to a countryman, though I see plainly enough you are not what you wish to be thought. But I have been hunted twice like a bandog. Let them do it again (he clutched the knife at his

girdle) and they will find this long enough to reach their black hearts.'

"Nay, Nicolo, Nicolo," exclaimed a young and handsome woman, coming from a small chamber adjoining, with a fine child in her arms, 'do not be getting into a passion. You promised me, Caro, for the sake of our dear little one, not to let your temper—'

"There, wife, say no more—I am dumb. Curse them! You won't deny me that pleasure?"

"Perhaps," said I, "you could guide us to where old Domenichino is. I am a friend of your chief, and have much to say to his old huntsman and bailiff. I wish also to know what has become of Vanina, the daughter of the Count Cecaldi."

"As to guiding you, signor," replied the peasant, changing his tones and manner, "to where old Domenichino defies his enemies, till I know you and your purpose, you must excuse me. Respecting the Lady Vanina, who was thought to be betrothed to our young chief before the wars, she fell by an unlucky chance into the hands of Casa Bianca, who says he holds her as a hostage in order to keep her numerous vassals (who broke out several times into insurrection some months back) in check. She is, I believe, in Castle Ranuncio, which Antonetti and Casa Bianca are fortifying. Indeed, it is said that Antonetti is to wed the heiress, giving a third of her possessions to this Casa Bianca. Again, they say the Genoese refuses to give him the maiden unless he finds this treasure of our count's; but the place where it is buried is known only to Domenichino: accordingly, a large sum is offered for the stout-hearted old huntsman. But he and his grandson defy them. They have already shot four of Bianca's soldiers."

"By St. Anthony," suddenly exclaimed my hitherto silent attendant, "by St. Anthony, Nicolo, you will hardly refuse to tell the son where he may find, and die in defence of, his brave old father!"

"Tomaso Domenichino!" joyfully exclaimed the peasant, starting forward to grasp the hand of my follower, who stood up and uncovered his face. "How is this? You are," said he, turning to me, "our chief! The saints be praised!"

"The poor fellow's joy was, in truth, great, and I had some difficulty in calming his delight.

"You must not, however, loiter here, my lord," resumed Nicolo, "for Antonetti's bailiff comes to this cottage almost every day. In fact, I am only staying here by the desire of Domenichino to watch their doings at La Rocca; so, if you are

not too fatigued, we will set out this moment for the hiding-place of the huntsman and his grandson—for he will give you information you little expect.'

"To this I willingly agreed, for I at once made up my mind to rescue Vanina from the hands of her persecutors. You know that Vanina and I were brought up together; for her father, the Count Cecaldi, was my guardian. I had not seen the maiden for several years. She was scarcely fourteen then, and a very pretty girl she promised to be.

"We were soon ready to set out, Nicolo having taken from a secret place his bow and a couple of stout hunting spears; for our way lay through a very wild tract of forest land, full of the most savage race of boars in Corsica.

"'Nicolo! Nicolo!' exclaimed his wife, as we were leaving the hut, 'you are going without the *Petra quadrata*.'

"I turned round on hearing those words, and beheld this famous relic of our ancient superstition. No one stirs without this charm in our province."

"What the deuce is it?" interrogated Paoli; "I never heard of it."

"I dare say not," replied Sampiero. "Though I am a native of the province myself, I never, to my knowledge, heard of it till the unfortunate Berenice, in speaking of the antiquities of Corsica, mentioned this stone. It is a sort of mineral, found in little square bits, hard like marble, in colour resembling iron ore, and heavy as lead. How it came to acquire its mystic virtues I cannot say; but even Nicolo, a shrewd, clever fellow enough, when I laughingly asked its properties, gravely replied,—'No ill-luck will happen to the wearer, if an honest and true man.' He added that it was rare to find, and many wore false bits. His, he affirmed, was veritable *Petra quadrata*. I made no reply; but, glad to have in my hand a good tough boar-spear, we set out.

"For three hours we traversed a wild tract of country, meeting whole herds of our wild and high-spirited horses. We then entered a vast pine wood, and, in two hours more, just as the moon rose above the snow-capped summit of Monte Rotunda, we entered the picturesque valley of the Azinao, into which, from a prodigious height, tumbles the river Azinao, forming a splendid cascade. It took us full two hours to ascend the hill, that rises almost perpendicularly over the torrent.

"Here we must now pause," said our guide.

"And, by the mass! it was time for a more laborious or dangerous journey on foot I never made. I was fairly tired, as

nearly two years had elapsed since I had so exercised myself; and Nicolo had declared, in setting out, that few, excepting the mountaineers of that wild district, could scale the rocks and hills of the valley of the Azinao.

“At the other side of this hill, and near the cascade,” said Nicolo, “are encamped the traitor Antonetti and his party; and not a thousand yards from us is the hiding-place of old Domenichino. When you are rested, my lord, we will proceed. You will travel the rest of the way by ropes.”

“I looked round me. We were then standing about two hundred feet above the cascade of the Azinao, on the brow of a hill covered with gigantic pines, for which this part of Corsica has been famous ever since the time of the early Romans, who are said to have built so prodigious a ship of the pines of Corsica that she carried fifty sails. The whole side of the hill down which I looked was covered with the arbutus, or strawberry tree. In the clear moonlight the scene was enchanting and sublime, while the roar of the falls came distinctly to the ear. To my right rose a most singular rock, above a hundred feet high, against whose steep sides and polished surface the moonbeams were glancing.

“After a few minutes’ repose, Nicolo gathered together several of the conical pine-seeds, and striking a light put it to the soft, tinder-like bark of a tree which the peasants use for that purpose. In a minute a bright blaze shot up into the air, and lasted nearly a quarter of an hour, while I anxiously watched the result, guessing it to be a preconcerted signal.

“Look up to the summit of the rock, my lord,” said Nicolo. As I did so I beheld a dark object show itself over the cliff, which I soon perceived to be the head and part of the body of a man, and then another by its side. A low whistle was now heard from above, to which Nicolo replied by another of a peculiar sound; and shortly after I saw a rope-ladder descending the perpendicular side of the rock.”

“How on earth did old Domenichino get up there?” I exclaimed; “for, *per Bacco*, there is not footing for a goat anywhere.”

“Some years ago,” said Nicolo, “the old man was hiding in this part. You must have been a child at that time. It was during one of our unfortunate risings against our oppressors. On the summit of this rock the huntsman beheld one of those strange animals we call *Mufoli*. They resemble a stag, but have horns like a ram. When hotly pursued, these animals will cast themselves from the top of a precipice, and pitch upon their horns without any hurt. Domenichino, with

a bolt from his cross-bow, killed the animal, but it remained on the summit ; and, finding it impossible to ascend the rock anywhere, he and his comrade cut with their axes a young pine from this clump, and, laying it against the side of the rock succeeded, after some difficulty, in gaining the summit. On examining the place, Domenichino at once determined on it as a place of refuge. You will see, on ascending, what a singular place it is.'

" Nicolo ascended first, to prepare the old man for my appearance. I then followed, and was welcomed by my faithful old retainer with enthusiasm. He embraced his son with tears in his eyes, for he confessed he never expected to see him again. ' A pretty eagle's nest you have, Domenichino ; why, half a dozen men might keep this eyrie against fifty.'

" He then led the way into a deep hollow, formed into several spacious caverns in the sides, in one of which the huntsman and his grandson made their present abode. They had brought various articles into it, making it a tolerably comfortable retreat.

" ' It is a safe nest, my lord,' said the old man ; ' but a poor place wherein to welcome the owner of the broad lands around us.'

" ' You have suffered much, my good Domenichino ; and the pleasure of seeing you here is greater delight to me than I can express. Your grandson is grown into a fine youth. I wish both you and he had accompanied me to Rome, where I might have settled you happily for the rest of your days.'

" ' What ! ' exclaimed the old man, ' and left the traitor Antonetti to fill his own coffers and those of Casa Bianca with your gold, and the spoils of your house ? No, no ! I swore to watch and protect it, and I have done so. Crafty as he is chucked the old huntsman, ' he may turn up all the land on both sides of the Azinao, from Bavello to Dwino, and explore all the caves beneath the cascade, but not a zechino or a goblet of silver will he find. It's all safe, my lord,' and he rubbed his hands with glee,—' money, plate, jewels, all safe,—and not fifty yards from here, excepting the massive plate, and that lies three fathoms deep in its iron chests beneath the waters of the lake of Azinao.'

" I pressed the old man's hand, and inquired how he had contrived to move it from its original place, and whether my treacherous kinsman had obtained any hints as to its whereabouts.

" ' He has certainly procured some knowledge as to the vicinity, though not the exact spot,' replied Domenichino, ' for

he has never ceased turning up various places near the cascade of the Azinao. The money and small cases I and my grandson conveyed here in various journeys, and hoisted them up by ropes. Nicolo and his wife's two brothers (better or braver patriots there are none) helped us with the chests. I contrived, one stormy night, to creep so close to the tent in which Antonetti and Casa Bianca were sitting drinking, that I overheard a conversation which made my heart beat wildly, and which, my good lord, will transport you with joy. So prepare yourself for a wonderful story. General Paoli is still in existence, and has escaped from the prison in Genoa! Casa Bianca was also speaking of the rupture between France and Genoa, and the expected withdrawal of the French force from Corsica.'

"But, not to weary you, Giacinto, this intelligence so inspired me that I resolved to raise the standard of revolt the moment the French troops should be withdrawn. 'The first thing to be done,' said I to the huntsman, 'will be to seize upon the persons of Antonetti and Casa Bianca, and carry them with us to the fastness of Monte Bavello. Do you think you could raise some fifty of my retainers for that purpose?' 'Ay, my lord. In twenty-four hours, I engage to assemble around us two hundred as good and brave fellows as any on the island.'

"To shorten my tale: In three days I mustered nearly two hundred men—poorly armed, it is true, but resolute, and willing to die in the cause of their country. We attacked Casa Bianca and his party of treasure-hunters. The commander was a fierce soldier, and fought stoutly; but, being surprised, he was slain. Antonetti was secured, and we carried him with us to the hills. In three weeks the French troops had quitted the island, and before twenty-four hours had elapsed a hundred signal-fires blazed upon the summits of our hills. The whole of our province now flew to arms; and, at the head of a strong force, I surprised Porto Vecchio, and released my beautiful cousin. Of course I fell in love with her, though in sooth I had little time for wooing. Having placed her in safety in the mansion of a friend, I again retreated to the hills; for a powerful body of troops were advancing from Corte against us. But the sparks of freedom were kindled; and although, for nearly a year, we were able to do but little, yet our forces increased each moment all over the island.

"At length came news of the defeat of the Genoese fleet off Llorca, in Sardinia, and of the tumults in Genoa. Consternation seized upon the Genoese commanders in Corsica. I again became the assailant, seized several places, and was besieged

ing La Rocca, when you astonished us all by your appearance among us at Corte, which fell into your hands. Papers were found disclosing the treachery and treason of Antonetti, who had betrayed that city to Campaldino ; and while you were laying siege to Bastia, Gaffieri caused Antonetti to be tried. He was condemned and hung, without pity, from the very ramparts on which the brave Cecaldi and others had perished through his treachery.

“ After the landing of your noble father, and when the freedom of our native land was achieved, while you returned to Venice to seek after your betrothed, I took Vanina from her retreat, and placed her under the protection of my aunt, the Countess Rivalora ; and I am happy to say, when we return with your lady-love from this expedition, which I trust we shall, I have Vanina’s promise to unite her destiny to mine.

“ So now, Giacinto, I have made my tale as short as possible ; for I see it will soon be time for us to be moving ; and, please the saints, to-morrow will be a busy and a fortunate day with us.”

CHAPTER XLIX.

ST. JOHN’S DAY.

ST. JOHN’S DAY was ushered in by the inhabitants of the island of Capraja by the ringing of bells, the decoration of their houses, and various other observances, according to the usages of saint-days in Catholic communities. The principal inhabitants of the island repaired to the house of the ex-podesta, where they were to put on their white mantles, hoods, &c. Padre Bertoldi, the sole priest then on the island, was to head the procession, carrying a silver image of our Saviour, the only relic of value left by the cupidity of the invaders.

During the night, Paoli and his party had safely crossed the island, and were waiting anxiously the arrival of the forty chief inhabitants, who were permitted to visit the chapel in the fortress. The astonishment of the caprese, when led by the ex-podesta into the long warehouse where stood Paoli, in a suit of chain mail, leaning on a ponderous battle-axe, may easily be imagined. Their joy was almost too boisterous for the place and time. Having moderated their transports at the prospect of so speedy a release from their tyrants, and retali-

tion for their wrongs and sufferings, the old and venerable priest blessed the whole party, and their intended expedition.

Paoli instructed them how they were to proceed. The mantles and hoods were transferred to himself and thirty-nine of his men ; the rest were to mingle with the people following the procession ; and the moment Paoli and his party passed the gate, they were to rouse the people, distribute arms, and lead them after Paoli into the fortress. This part of the plan was left under the direction of Luca Manifesto, who carried a stout bow,—a weapon in the use of which, when a youth in the Tyrol, he was celebrated. His skill was wonderful in hitting any object, however small.

Paoli carried his battle-axe under his mantle, but was forced, from his great height, to remain without helmet, and to wear a simple hood of chain mail. He much wished Padre Bertoldi to give up heading the procession, fearing that, in the tumult, the old man would be slain. "I shall die, my son, in a good and holy cause, if it so pleases the Almighty. Let me, therefore, do my duty, in which I have not failed for six-and-twenty years."

All being in readiness, the procession left the mansion of the Signor Buttaficcio, the priest carrying the silver image. Then came four banners, and, after them, the rest with immense wax-tapers in their hands, to be lighted in the chapel. In Catholic countries, the mantles and hoods completely envelop the person and face of the wearers, having only two holes in the front, for the eyes, and an aperture to breathe through.

The long, single street, which then constituted the town of Capraja, was filled with men, women, and children ; the maidens with garlands in their hands, and the children strewing flowers along the road on which the procession moved.

As they proceeded slowly, our hero cast his glance over the inner and outer harbour, and perceived two fine zebecs, with the Genoese flag hoisted, at anchor in the inner harbour, close under the walls of the fortress. The low round tower, within which was the machine for raising the ponderous chain, had a covered way leading to the fortress up an exceedingly perpendicular rock, whereon was reared the outward wall of the ramparts. A glorious sun rode in the heavens ; and a fine breeze curled the waters of the outward harbour, on whose bosom rode several vessels at anchor. Before him rose the pile of building forming the noble fortress of Capraja ; and from the summit of the keep, in honour of the day, waved the gorgeous banner of the republic. Beneath it drooped the once free standard of Capraja.

"By the mass, Giacinto," whispered Sampiero, who walked close beside Paoli, "before another hour is out, I trust to change the position of those two banners! But stoop your head, cousin mine. By St. John, you look two heads higher than any man born on this little island!"

"I am sorely cramped as it is, Otho," returned our hero; "and, by my faith, long to stretch myself, and have a mouthful of fresh air. The aperture for my mouth unfortunately comes across my nose, and I am half blinded to boot. But silence! See, there are a score of armed men drawn up at the entrance of the narrow pass, leading to the draw-bridge of the fortress."

"Yes, *cospetto!* And at their head I see my tall friend, Achilles Furiani," responded Otho.

Both then remained silent, as they were approaching the narrow causeway.

As they came abreast of the twenty comrades of Achilles, the men lowered their long spears and bent their heads to the cross; and when the forty men forming the procession entered the causeway, Achilles made a sign to his comrades, and they immediately formed athwart the rocky pass.

Paoli observed this movement; but it was nothing more than he had expected an experienced commander, like Andrea Campaldino, would order, considering the smallness of the garrison compared with the people still remaining on the island.

The procession, two by two, wound up the steep path, and arrived at the bridge, which was down, and the portcullis raised. Paoli could discern files of men-at-arms drawn up in military array, and all in full mail, having for a weapon the short broadsword ready drawn in their hands. Being a wary commander, Campaldino, though without a shade of suspicion, had the whole of his garrison under arms. He himself, in a splendid suit of plate armour, was leaning carelessly on his sword, as he stood near one of the buttresses of the inner court. Four men were placed on each side of the gateway, near the ponderous machine used to raise the unwieldy portcullis.

The good priest, Padre Bertoldi, had passed the bridge, when one of the men, bearing the banner, tripped against the iron plates of the drawbridge, and fell at full length. His short sword, carried under his mantle, flew from his hand in the fall, and his iron cuirass rang out clearly and distinctly, as it struck against the rim of the bridge. The warder of the gate saw the sword, and heard the clangour of steel. Springing back towards the gate, he shouted his last cry; for the words,

‘Treachery ! Up bridge !’ had scarcely passed his lips, when the axe of Paoli brained him on the spot.

The scene that ensued was like magic. The words of the ill-starred warder had reached the ears of Campaldino. One moment he stood astounded. That lost moment was fate ; for though he cried out in a loud voice, “Drop the portcullis !” it was too late. Paoli had torn the mantle from his back ; and, with a bound, reached the spot where the four men, somewhat bewildered by the abruptness of the cry of treachery, and the moment of irresolution that followed, stood with the spokes of the wheel in their hands. Whirling his fatal axe over his head, he swept the space clear of the men, who fled within the gate. Sampiero and the rest of the party, casting aside their mantles, dashed after their chief, making the archway echo again to the shout of “Paoli and liberty !”

At the sound of that name Campaldino, who was eagerly pressing forward with his men (for, till that moment, he estimated the attempt upon the fortress as a miserable and futile scheme of the islanders themselves), paused and was confounded. His irresolution, however, was only for a moment. With a bitter curse upon his lip, he ordered his chief officer to block the gate—for they were three times the amount of the enemy—and, turning away himself, he rushed into the interior of the castle, vowing inwardly that if he sacrificed life, he would have vengeance.

During this brief period the whole male population of the island, capable of bearing or using arms, had become acquainted with the project of taking the fortress. Luca Manifesto supplied most of them with arms ; and the rest, catching up any kind of implement capable of being turned into a weapon of defence, followed Luca ; and to the utter amazement of Furiani, a host of natives, shouting wildly and enthusiastically the name of Paoli, rushed madly upon him and his twenty associates.

“*Corpo di Bacco !* All the devils are let loose on the island. Stand firm, my men. We shall soon drive these madmen into the sea.”

But Achilles had hardly uttered the words before he found himself standing the whole brunt of the battle. For the twenty adventurers, never famous for fighting against equal numbers, fled up the steep path to the fortress, at the sight of nearly two hundred men, brandishing all sorts of weapons as they came bounding along. Furiani bitterly cursed the cowardice of his comrades ; and, standing in the middle of the narrow causeway, he courageously determined to fall where he stood.

Gallantly did the Genoese defend the path, till, overpowered by the pressure of the crowd, he fell ; and the Caprese, eager to assist Paoli, trampled over his huge body as it lay unwounded. Being cased in complete mail, the damage he sustained was trifling ; and not one of the party stopped to ascertain whether he was dead or alive.

In the meantime, Paoli and Sampiero battled against the entire garrison of the fortress, led on by a brave and skilful officer. The space was confined, till the terrible battle-axe of the Corsican opened the thick ranks of the Genoese ; and, followed by his men, fighting gallantly, he forced his way into the open space beyond the gates, having first cut and destroyed all the ropes of the draw-bridge and disabled the wheels of the portcullis. Paoli eagerly sought for Andrea Campaldino. The officer who commanded the garrison, and who wore his visor down, being mistaken for Andrea, our hero cut his way through the astonished Genoese soldiers till he reached him. The first blow of his battle-axe tore the helmet from the head of the officer, who fell back stunned and bleeding. Still, the thick ranks of the men-at-arms blocked up the path to the interior of the fortress, when a loud cheer, and his own name echoed from wall and bastion, proclaimed the arrival of Luca Manifesto and the islanders, driving before them the comrades of Achilles.

Burning with anxiety to terminate the contest, knowing how deep was Campaldino's desire of vengeance, and fearing he knew not what for his betrothed, Paoli cheered on his men, and, whirling his axe over his head, every blow brought down a victim. Thus he cut his way through the men-at-arms, who, terrified by his fearful strength and irresistible strokes, and seeing their officer sorely wounded, and deserted by their commander, threw down their arms and surrendered.

As Paoli made his way through the men-at-arms, he beheld, crossing the court before the inner gate of the building, a man in a rich suit of armour, bearing a female in his arms, apparently insensible. He was making rapid way towards a low gateway in the ramparts, which led to the tower on the water's edge, from which there was a secret passage. Campaldino—for he it was bearing the fainting Lady Agnes in his arms—intended to escape through that outlet ; for, anchored close to the tower, were the two Genoese zebecs. But Paoli, who had recognized Andrea, sprang with a shout of triumph between him and the path to the gate. With a withering curse Campaldino turned aside, and, active and determined, gained the rampart wall. Below him, within four feet, was a perpendic-

ular descent of nearly a hundred feet, terminating in a range of broken rock. In a loud and clear voice he shouted to Paoli, who was rushing forward,—

“I triumph, rebel, even in defeat! I perish, but with me dies thy betrothed! Vengeance is still mine!”

As he spoke he raised the maiden in his arms; but, as he did so, the twang of a bow was heard close beside the horror-stricken Paoli. The same instant an arrow, driven with unerring aim and deadly force, entered the brain of Campaldino. With a frantic and desperate energy, Paoli sprang upon the rampart; and, even before the lifeless body of the Genoese lay stretched upon the wall, he caught the senseless form of Agnes, unhurt, in his arms; while Luca Manifesto, with a smile, turning to Sampiero, who had arrived in time to witness his hazardous and marvellous skill with the bow, said—“You see, my lord, presentiment and an internal prompting are not always to be despised. I could not say why I felt the strange hankering to hold again my favourite weapon. When, leaving home, I selected this good bow, I tried several shots, and I found that the skill which once gave me a proud name in my native hills had not deserted me. The night before we sailed from Ficocli, I dreamed I stood upon the summit of the Brochden, and, below me, I beheld the Signor Paoli. His hands were bound; and coming towards him was a monstrous bear, howling fearfully. I put an arrow in my bow, and though the distance in my dream was beyond all the power of a bow, I shot, and the arrow stood quivering in the brain—not of a bear, but, a knight in full mail. With this I awoke. I carried my bow with me; and, thank God! this day it has repaid in part the noble generosity of my lord.”

“And now,” said Sampiero, looking up with a satisfied smile at the tall standard on the keep, “the free banner of Capraja waves over the flag of the proud republic. May it never wave over a race of freemen again!”

As the count ceased speaking, and followed Paoli into the interior of the fortress, one long, wild, and enthusiastic shout rent the air—“Paoli and the islands for ever!” Such was the cry; and, before it died away, the two armed zebecs cut their cables, and, hoisting every sail to the brecze, rapidly receded from the rocky shores of Capraja.

CONCLUSION.

SEVENTEEN years since the events recorded in the foregoing chapter had passed away ; many a St. John's day had been celebrated in the little island of Capraja ; and many of the inhabitants who had then flourished in it had quitted the scene, when, towards the close of a very stormy day at the latter end of September, there stood, leaning over the rampart wall of the fortress, three individuals ; one, an old and extremely venerable-looking signor ; the other two, a fine and handsome woman, still in her prime, and a tall and graceful boy.

"Come here, Paulo," said the old signor to the boy ; "your eyes are younger and better than mine ; though, the Madonna be praised, I have much to be thankful for, and my sight is not yet absolutely bad. Look and tell me if that is not a dismasted carick away to the westward. There seems to me to be a thick haze over the craft, and creeping up towards us."

"You are right, granduncle," said the boy, after a moment's hesitation. "I can now make her out quite plain. She is a galley without masts ; and I do not see that they are using their oars. She is rolling heavily in the swell after last night's gale."

"She has suffered, no doubt," said the old signor, "from the hurricane of last night ; and probably may not be able to use her sweeps. Our pilots are grown lazy of late. Hoist the signal, Paulo, and make it known that a vessel is in distress in the offing."

"I'll do it in a moment, granduncle," replied the boy ; "and afterwards I will run down to the quay and go out in a boat to her with old Filippo."

"Nay, Paulo, you had better not," rejoined his mother, who was no other than Annette, the pretty niece of the reinstated podesta of Capraja, who, after the storming of the fortress, had—start not, gentle reader, if you are of the softer sex—actually married the huge Achilles Furiani. The why and the how we will explain before the end of the chapter. "It is getting late ; the sea is still heaving," continued the mother, "and may rise as suddenly as it abated."

"Nay, mother, you need not fear. An hour will take us to

the galley and back ;" and, without stopping, the boy hoisted the signal and then made away to the quay.

In less than half an hour, three well-manned boats pulled from the harbour ; and, before the sun had set, the dismasted and leaky galley was safely moored in the inner harbour of Car aja.

From the galley's side a noble-looking and richly attired signor, about forty-three years old, descended into a barge sent by the governor, who was our old acquaintance, the Signor Buttaficcio. The stranger then handed down the side a lady, closely wrapped in mantles, with a hood over her head and face. She appeared to be suffering either from ill health or the effects of a long and stormy voyage. A remarkably handsome and spirited-looking youth followed, with a lovely girl, into the boat, which then pulled for the shore ; and, shortly after, the strangers and their attendants were lodged, by orders of the podesta, in the best apartments of the fortress.

It was not till the following day that the storm-tossed voyagers were able to accept of the hospitable attentions of the podesta, and then only the signor and his son met at the table of their venerable host and his niece, whose husband was absent in Pisa, whither he had taken his daughter and eldest son to spend a week or so.

The lady and her daughter were yet weak from the effects of the voyage.

"We are vastly indebted to you, Signor Podesta, and to your very obliging people," said the noble stranger, as he warmly returned the kind greetings of the old podesta. "Had not your boats reached us we should scarcely have outlived the night. We could only keep the leaks down by all hands bailing. If we ceased a moment to row, we ran the danger of sinking. During the whole voyage from Marseilles (and we have been thirteen days at sea) we experienced tremendous gales from the land. Last night we lost our remaining mast and four of our unfortunate crew. My wife and daughter suffered greatly."

"It was, in truth, a fearful night, signor," returned the podesta. "The gale howled so awfully over the ramparts, and through the chambers of this fortress, that I could not rest. I am happy, signor, to have been able to render you some assistance ; and I can also furnish you with everything necessary for the repairs of your galley."

"If I mistake not, Signor Governor," remarked the stranger, after returning thanks, "this romantic island belonged, or, perhaps, still belongs, to an ancient Corsican family, the

Damaris. Pray, is the Marchese Bartolomeo Damari still living?"

"Three days ago, signor, thanks to a merciful Providence ! he was alive, and, for his years, well."

"I rejoice in my heart to hear such is the case, signor," returned the stranger, with a pleased smile. "I have not heard any intelligence of him, or those dear to him, for the last fourteen years. All that bear the name of Damari and Paoli are dear to the memory of my consort and myself."

At that moment the door of the saloon opened, and the young daughter of the princely-looking stranger entered and kissed her father, who looked fondly and proudly upon the fair and graceful girl, to whose cheeks the roses were fast returning.

"Well, love," said he, "how fares your mother ?"

"So very much better does she feel, dear father, that she bids me say she will shortly follow me, so anxious is she to converse with our kind host concerning those she has so often regretted and so fondly loved."

The old governor looked bewildered upon the fair speaker. Years past seemed to come before the mind's eye, at once vivid and indistinct. In the fine features of the stranger's child he fancied the daughter of the Damaris stood before him, as she did years ago. Who was this princely stranger, whose child conjured up such distant remembrances ? The governor passed his hands over his eyes, and muttered something to himself. Then he thought a strange smile sat upon the stranger's features ; but the next moment the consort of the latter entered.

"Signor Buttaficcio," said the lady, advancing to prevent the old governor from rising, and extending her hand, which the worthy podesta received with profound respect, and looked into her features with a start of astonishment. The lady smiled, and continued—"We are old friends, though we have not met before. I see you look upon me with bewildered surprise ; for, no doubt, you perceive the strong likeness that has always existed between me and Agnes Damari, or rather the Countess Paoli. We can have no reserve with you, the dear friend of my beloved Agnes's father." The lady looked at her husband, and continued—"My husband is Ugolino Carrara, and I was once Paulina Tiepolo."

"Santa Madonna !" exclaimed the podesta ; "can this be the case ? Ugolino Carrara was driven, as I have heard, from his principality by the tyranny and treachery of Venice."

"Even so, Signor Governor," returned the Carrara, some-

what bitterly. "But they have not been able to take from me these treasures," and his arm enfolded the still beautiful Paulina—"so I forgive them."

"And now, dear Signor Buttaficcio," said the princess, "tell me all about my beloved Agnes and her noble husband. The last we heard of them was from a Corsican signor whom we met at Milan. But he could only speak of the past. I wish, however, to hear of the events that followed Paoli's return to Corsica, and of the occurrences that took place on the restoration of the Marchese Damari to Capraja."

"Willingly, dear lady," returned the governor, "will I inform you of all that happened to those you love so well, and who also dearly remember you and yours. Before I begin, may I ask, does your ladyship's noble father still live?"

"Alas, no!" replied the Princess Carrara, with a sigh. "My beloved father has been dead three years, but he reached a fair term of life, and his latter days were most happy. Perhaps it was as well he lived not to see his child, and her husband, and all his race, doomed by the tyrants of Venice to become wanderers from their homes."

The Signor Buttaficcio then gave the princess a full account of all the trials undergone by Agnes subsequently to her return to Capraja.

"After the taking of the fortress," continued the old podesta, "Paoli departed with his betrothed and her father for Corsica, where, very shortly after, they were married. Luca Manifesto, whose daring nerve and skill had saved the Lady Agnes at a moment of terrible peril, was presented by the generous Paoli—as a gift to him and his heirs for ever—with the small but rich fief of Ficaoli. His son, who grew into a fine youth, is now in Rome for education, with the eldest son of Paoli. General Paoli still lives, and busies himself with the welfare of his beloved country. He has concluded a treaty with France, and permitted a French settlement on the island; so that Genoa, even if she attempts to recover the island, will no longer have the powerful assistance of France. Count Otho Sampiero married Vanina Cecaldi, and devotes his time and great wealth in building and strengthening the harbours and towns on the coast. Juliano Verbano, your *ci-devant* gondolier, married the daughter of Luca Manifesto, and is steward over the Paoli property of Mariana. Pulini, our patron's faithful squire, is still about the person of his chief, but treated more as the friend than the dependant."

"And that fair dame we saw yester-eve, when we came here,

and that fine boy, who are they, Signor Buttaficcio ?" demanded the Princess Carrara.

" My niece, your ladyship, and her son. Singularly enough, one of the officers, named Achilles Furiani, who came here in the company of the Genoese governor, Campaldino, insisted, during the time the Genoese held this island, on offering himself as a suitor to one of my nieces—for I have two, your ladyship ; but Annette, who was then a lively and somewhat giddy girl, at times laughed at and tormented her huge lover, who is a man of very lofty stature, and in truth of a goodly presence, though at that time somewhat given to wine. But, Santa Madonna ! he is so changed now that no one would imagine he was the same individual. Excuse an old man's garrulity.

" At the storming of the fortress Achilles was deserted by his men ; he fought bravely, but was overthrown by the crowd of enraged natives, and trampled under foot as they rushed up the steep path to the castle. He was, however, only bruised ; but, as he rose to make his way back into the fortress, he was again assailed by those left behind, and finally wounded on the head by a heavy crow-bar. The furious people were going to carry him, armour and all, and throw him into the port, when my niece stopped the crowd, and insisted on their leaving the wounded man under our roof. I came up at the time, and forbade their committing so cruel and unnecessary an act. Accordingly Furiani was carried into the house ; and, to shorten my story, during eight or nine weeks Annette was his nurse ; for, somehow or other, the girl did not dislike this strange man. When he got well he refused to quit the island, for all his countrymen were exchanged—though, by the by, he swears he is not a Genoese, but a native of Milan. However, here he stayed, became an altered man, left off all his old habits, and, after a year's trial, Annette married him. General Paoli and his son, two years subsequently, visited our island ; the younger Paoli knew something of Achilles Furiani before. It appears he had acted humanely towards the signor when taken prisoner and wounded at Pera ; and, hearing how well Achilles has conducted himself since his marriage, and knowing him to be a brave and also a skilful soldier, he gave him the command of the garrison of this fortress, and a good salary out of the tolls collected from the shipping. Achilles leads a very happy life, is devoted to his wife and family, and keeps his fortress and garrison in great order. He is now absent in Pisa, but we expect him shortly. Once every year our young chief and his beloved consort visit this little island, which he inherits in right of his wife

"And now, dear lady, I have told my tale, and I trust have not fatigued you with my prolix narrative."

"Far from it. In truth, my dear sir, I have not lost one word, for every trifle relating to those dear relatives and friends is gratifying to my heart. Were we not now, for political reasons, anxiously desirous to reach Naples, what joy it would give us to spend a few days with your chief and his family; but we have already lost precious time, and much of our future fate depends on this voyage."

Three days after this, the galley of Carrara was sufficiently repaired to put to sea. After many kind remembrances, and a packet of letters for the Countess Paoli, written during their stay, the noble but persecuted Carrara and his beloved consort, who clung to him devotedly through the whole of his singular and romantic fortunes, left the shores of Capraja to embark again on the stormy path that was destined to be his from the cradle to the grave.

THE END

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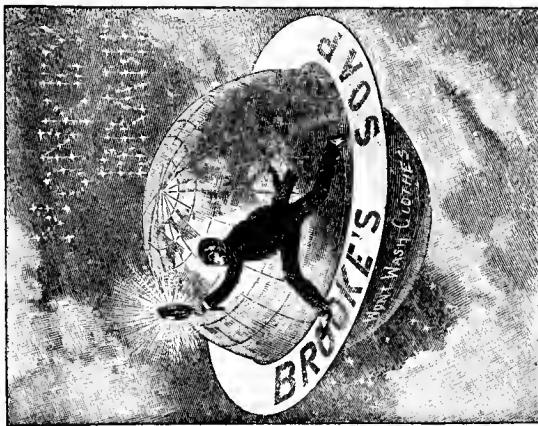
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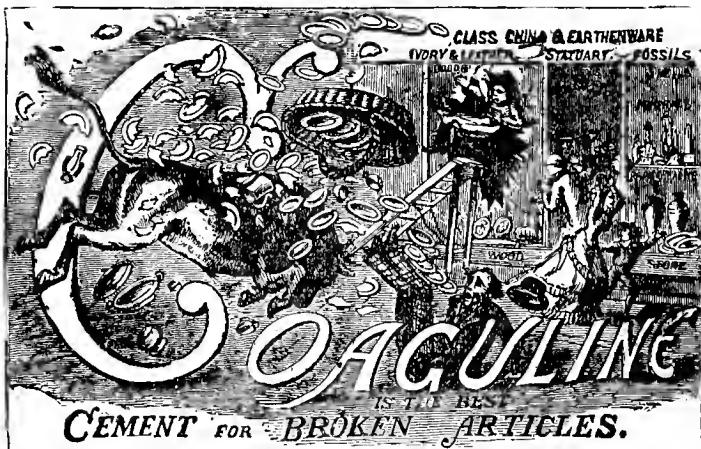
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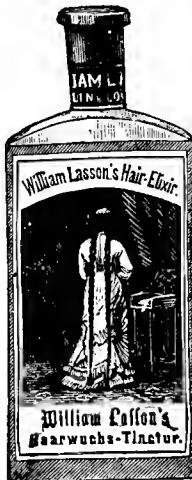
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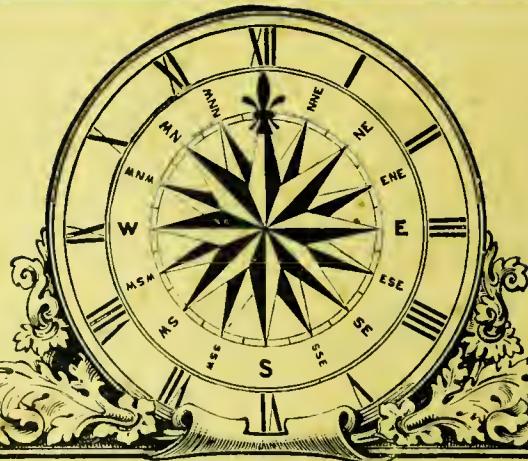
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